

LUND UNIVERSITY
Centre for languages and literature
Middle East studies

Master thesis MÖK 504
Spring 2008
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“O’ Great Nation of Iraq”

**A Study on Iraqi Blogs - Examining the Impact of the ‘Group Situation’ in
the Formation of the Ba‘thi Propaganda Heritage**

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Abstract

This master thesis is a mass communication study on cognitive and affective effects of the Iraqi Ba‘th regime’s propaganda, focusing on a specific segment of the receiving side of the influence process – the Arab middle class in Baghdad. This segment is here represented by a selection of Iraqi blogs, used as sources for analysis. The analysis is performed on the assumption that 1) effects always are conditional phenomena having functional explanations, and are guided by the receivers’ interests, needs, experiences, norms, relation to the sender etc; 2) such guiding factors are fairly similar for members of the same social grouping. Investigating the blog-sources I have searched for both the very effects and for factors in the bloggers’ *group situation* which have facilitated or hindered the messages to achieve their purposes. My work reveals that some parts of the propaganda have been accepted, while others have not and hence resulted in effects opposite to the intentions. It further reveals that the occurrences and characters of the effects have been determined by factors such as the impacts of the modernisation, the circumstances characterising the bloggers’ daily lives, and the experiences of decades of political violence and wars. One of the most important findings is that the overall propaganda heritage is highly formed by the actual experiences of propaganda measures. These have resulted in a grave distrust towards political actors and their rhetoric, a distrust which reaches far beyond the Ba‘thi context.

Keywords: Iraq, propaganda, media effects, Baghdad, blogs, the Ba‘th Party, the Arab World, Arabism

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1. Introduction

For decades, the Iraqi citizen memorized his duties, what he should do and most important what he should not do. It's time to recognize our rights, hear, see, talk, object and express our thoughts. It's time we participate. We are the sons of Hamorabi.¹ (Mohammed – blogger at *Iraq the Model*)

1. 1 Background

The term ‘propaganda’ can be defined as referring to a set of methods to affect people’s opinions, perceptions and behaviour by language, pictures, rituals etc in order to create or maintain a specific attitude towards a certain object, for instance a person, an ideology or an institution.² In the case of the Iraqi Ba‘th regime (1968-2003) more or less every method that could be thought of was employed. Indeed, it is difficult to find any field in the society not used for propaganda purposes. Designed to reach everyone everywhere throughout every stage of life,³ the regime’s propaganda machine is far more than a matter of political indoctrination. Or as Eric Davis explains in *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (2005), the Ba‘th clearly viewed violence as an important means of rule but realised that it could not rely on force alone. To achieve true hegemony the regime needed to structure and incorporate a collective identity and worldview which would encourage obedience and self-discipline among the citizens.⁴

Considering the great efforts and resources the Ba‘thi leadership put into propaganda measures it was probably well familiar with the thesis that people are acting in accordance with their *understandings* of reality, not with reality itself.⁵ In the field of mass communication this thesis can be said to constitute the very foundation of the row of theories about the effects of media (the vehicles for mass communication) on individuals and on societies. The main principle is that media content, whatever character it may have, is viewed as something that has the potential to become knowledge (in its broadest definition) that contributes to our understanding of the reality.⁶ This implies that the institutions for mass communication, and those who in one way or another control these, have a certain social power as they may form peoples’ perceptions, and consequently also their behaviour. But it is a mistake to take the connection and interaction between perception and behaviour for granted, especially when dealing with authoritarian societies. People may act in specific ways in order to escape reprisals or to gain rewards. Hence behaviour does not necessarily reflect perceptions.⁷ In the post-Ba‘thi context this raises the question of how successful the propaganda measures of the former regime actually were, besides making the Iraqis pay lip service to its messages or at least not openly oppose these.

¹ Mohammed, “Sabah, Make a Law for Him!”, *Iraq the Model*, March 8, 2004.

² See Kjell Möijer, 1994, *Propaganda: Språk & påverkan*, Ekelunds förlag, Solna, p 14.

³ Bengio, Ofra, 1998, *Saddam’s Word*, Oxford University Press, New York, p 126.

⁴ Davis, Eric, 2005, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, University of California Press, Berkeley, pp 3, 17.

⁵ For further reading on this thesis and its application in contexts of mass communication see for instance Maxwell McCombs, 2004, *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion*, Polity, Oxford.

⁶ See Denis McQuail, 1994, *Mass Communication Theory* (3rd Ed.), Sage Publications, London, p 64.

⁷ See Garth S. Jowett & Victoria O’Donnell, 1986, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, p 117.

Doubtless the Ba'thi propaganda has affected the Iraqis' perceptions of their own community and of the world. The question is: in what ways? About this, I argue, there is little knowledge since those exposed to the regime's messages have been largely forgotten as a research object (and, naturally, could not be studied properly as long as the Ba'th was in power). To find out more about both the receivers and the effects of the propaganda I have turned to the Iraqi blogosphere which emerged and began to grow shortly after the overthrow of the Ba'th regime in the spring of 2003.⁸ There a selection of bloggers was picked out as providers of a suitable material for analysis. Investigating the blog-sources I have searched not only for a propaganda heritage but also for the factors brought into play in the formation of it. Being a notably urban middle class phenomenon the blogs picked out for the analysis reflect a source material of this specific segment with a further narrowed focus on Baghdadis. Thereby the essay has a class perspective rather than the usual ethnic-religious one. Still, issues of ethnicity and religion are in no way ignored as such matters very much constitute the foundations of the Ba'thi messages.⁹

Apart from the scarcity of research on the receivers and their responses, propaganda of the Iraqi Ba'th is a fairly well-studied topic. Great efforts have been put into examining propaganda material concerning the regime's idea of national identity and loyalty. Open and hidden messages, themes, code words, and the political objectives behind these have been searched for and analysed. Besides the already mentioned Eric Davis, Ofra Bengio - author of the book *Saddam's Word* (1998) - ought to be ascribed a lot of these efforts. Although not dealing exclusively with the propaganda, Samir al-Khalil and his work *Republic of Fear* (1990) should also be observed. Likewise, the character of the Ba'thi leadership, its control over information, and the propaganda machine itself, have been paid a lot of attention, not least by organisations like *Reporters without Borders*.¹⁰

Despite the overall different approach this essay can be regarded to be a continuation of the previous research by Davis and Bengio among others. Yet, my work can also be viewed as a criticism not of entire studies but of assumptions made in them concerning the propaganda receivers. For instance, it has been assumed that the regime's messages are more deeply integrated among Sunni Arab Iraqis than among their Shi'i counterparts¹¹, and that the public at large have become prone to believe in conspiracy theories, especially those involving the US and Israel.¹² Generally it is also considered that the propaganda heightened ethnical and sectarian cleavages and fostered distrust among the citizens.¹³ Such conclusions may seem reasonable in the light of the serious and difficult situation developed in the country after the Coalition's invasion. Yet, they are problematic. They are based on very simplified

⁸ Reviews and links to Iraqi blogs available at <http://iraqblogcount.blogspot.com>

⁹ Propaganda of the Iraqi Ba'th is very much an issue of constant struggles between the regime's commitment to the pan-Arab ideology of the Ba'th Party and the coherence of the domestic population consisting of significant non-Arab minorities, and between the leadership's Sunni (Arab) dominance and the in contrast numerically dominating Shi'i population in Iraq. See for instance Bengio, 1998, pp 87-123.

¹⁰ Reports on the Iraqi situation for media and information under Ba'th available at <http://www.rsf.org>. Reports on the same issues by *International Press Institute* are available at <http://www.freemedia.at/cms/ipi/>.

¹¹ See Davis, 2005, pp 274-5.

¹² See Andrew Terrill, 2003, 'Nationalism, Sectarianism, and the Future of the U.S. Presence in post-Saddam Iraq', Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle, PA, pp 14-5. Also al-Khalil, Samir, 1990, *Republic of Fear*, Hutchinson Radius, London, pp 100-1.

¹³ See Davis, 2005, pp 6-7; Bengio, 1998, pp 100-8; al-Khalil, 1990, pp 108-9.

views on how influence processes of mass communication work and on the Iraqi population, often defined only in terms of ethnicity and religion.¹⁴ Consequently, they provide a most uncertain picture of the effects, thereby bringing on the risk of blaming current problems in Iraq on a propaganda heritage which may not exist in such a form as believed.

While previous research has mostly been done within the fields of national state building and political development in Iraq, this is a mass communication study. The analysis is performed on the basis of a theoretical framework which stresses the complexity involved in all attempts to affect people through mass communication, propaganda included. It takes into consideration that propaganda effects may be of many different kinds and are not always in line with the sender's intentions. It also takes into account that the receiver may modify a message before incorporating it to his/her personal mental picture of reality. A message can thereby undergo such a transformation that its purpose is not achieved. To put it differently, the propaganda effects might not necessarily be altogether 'bad' just because the underlying objectives of the messages can be viewed as such.

The general line in the essay is that the effectiveness, often directly or indirectly ascribed the Ba'thi propaganda, is overstated. This should not be confused with a trivialisation of the regime's use of methods for indoctrination, censorship and the like. There is nothing trivial about that the Iraqis for decades were deprived the rights of freedom to seek information and freedom of speech, or that many authors, journalists, artists, intellectuals, political opponents, religious leaders and others were forced into exile, arrested, tortured, executed or 'disappeared' in connection to the deprivation of these rights.¹⁵

1. 2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in the essay is broad rather than deep, as I have found it necessary to begin with the very grounds of theories and definitions relevant to this type of study. The main sources used in this section are *Mass Communication Theory* (1994) by Denis McQuail and *Propaganda and Persuasion* (1986) by Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell. The fundament of the framework is a model describing influence processes given by McQuail. For the analysis the latter part of the model is of more interest than the former. Still, as will be shown, it is important to understand the process in whole.

Before the review of the model some things ought to be clarified. Firstly, keeping to the basic and commonly agreed grounds this section does not account for differences among scholars. It should though be observed that even if the total research on mass communication is based on the premise that there *are* effects of the media, and a lot of attention has been put in on the subject, there is much disagreement within this field. There is for instance no real established consensus regarding to what degree we are affected or exactly what sorts of effects there are.¹⁶ The approach to the effect

¹⁴ Problems related to the rather one-dimensional ethno-religious view on the Iraqi people have been pointed out by some scholars. See for instance Ibrahim al-Marashi, 2007, 'The Dynamics of Iraq's Media: Ethno-Sectarian Violence, Political Islam, Public Advocacy, and Globalization', pp 20-1.

¹⁵ For further reading see for instance the reports from *Reporters without Borders*, *International Press Institute* and, *Amnesty International* listed in the bibliography of this essay.

¹⁶ See McQuail, 1994, pp 327-8.

phenomenon adopted in this essay largely follows a functional explanation describing it as something much guided by motives, wishes and needs among the receivers, here regarded as neither helpless preys to propaganda nor as totally immune to it.¹⁷

Secondly, propaganda ought not to be equalised with ‘lies’. It *can* be based on pure fabrications but also on truths, and, of course, we may likewise find propaganda somewhere between these extremes.¹⁸ Characteristic is that emotional and value loaded arguments are prioritised, since they are often more effective than rational ones. Propaganda usually consists of both open and hidden messages of which especially the latter are purposed to affect the receiver emotionally. Another feature is the lack of comprehensiveness and thoroughness. The reality is simplified and often described in black and white terms, such as ‘right and wrong’ or ‘good and evil’. Also observe that a propaganda campaign always is based on a specific theme, but its form and content are never fixed but adjusted in accordance with the situation.¹⁹

We may now turn to the model of influence processes. McQuail, who uses the model when discussing campaigns in general, thinks it is a good reminder of the many uncertainties connected to every attempt to direct people through mass communication.²⁰

| Collective → source | Several → channels | Many → messages | Filter → conditions | Variable → public reach | Effects |
|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | | | Attention Perception Group situation | | Cognitive Affective Behavioural |

The model draws attention to some key features in the process. To begin with, behind a campaign there is a source – a sender. Usually the source is a collective, such as a government or an organisation. Naturally, behind the campaign there is also a purpose, for instance that a certain point of view, behaviour etc should be adopted by the public or a specific group of people. Further, as the second and third stages of the model reveal, a campaign consists of many messages distributed through many channels. Proceeding in the model we find the filter conditions: attention, perception and group situation. These conditions facilitate or hinder the flow of messages to reach and affect the target audience in line with the source’s intentions. This in turn will cause a variable public reach, as it can hardly be expected that everyone will react on the messages in exactly the same way. Last in the process is the campaign’s result - the effects.²¹ McQuail makes a rough categorisation into three types: 1) cognitive effects, which concern our knowledge and opinions; 2) affective effects, which concern our feelings and attitudes; 3) effects on our behaviour.²² These may be planned and desired or unexpected and unwanted; range from strong reactions to hardly noticeable ones; be long-term or short-term. The success of the campaign is then measured by comparing its purpose with its achieved result. In each stage of the influence process there are a number of factors and circumstances that will

¹⁷ See McQuail, 1994, 341-2.

¹⁸ See Jowett & O’Donnell, 1986, pp 19-20.

¹⁹ See Möijer, 1994, pp 11, 15-16.

²⁰ McQuail, 1983, pp 190-1. Or McQuail, 1994, p 347.

²¹ See McQuail, 1994, pp 346-9.

²² See McQuail, 1994, pp 333-4.

have an impact on the outcome, positively or negatively. The stages, as well as the actors involved in them, ought not to be considered as isolated. They are interactive and affect each other. Therefore, it is important to have the whole process chain in mind, even when only a specific part of it is studied.²³

Mass communication is a contextual social act performed within a given place and time.²⁴ In the influence process circumstances, happenings and actors may affect the outcome even though not directly involved in it. Naturally, the more control the sender has over the total situation the more favourable it is for the sender.²⁵ In authoritarian societies information is usually highly controlled by the state, which is regarded to increase the possibilities of the official institutions to influence the public's notions, as the competition from alternative views is reduced. However, following the development of mass communication technology, strict control over information flows has become increasingly difficult to achieve and maintain.²⁶

Because of the approach in the essay a further examination of the filter conditions is required. The three listed in the model should be understood as representing different focuses rather than three separated phenomena. The starting-point for the account is the condition 'group situation', which is a main concern in the analysis. Methodically most effect studies are performed on an individual level, but purposed to draw conclusions on collective or higher levels. The assumption is that societies are not that individuated as sometimes is expected. Responses to messages have a tendency to vary systematically according to social groups (based on factors like age, gender, lifestyle, religion, occupation etc) and members of a grouping are inclined to roughly respond in the same way.²⁷ Group belongings may reflect possible variables for the audience's access to media technology and information, relation to the source/sender, interests, knowledge etc.²⁸ In turn such variables often affect circumstances relating to the other filter conditions.

The filter condition 'attention' points to the fact that, if a campaign is to have any chance to be successful, people must actually take notice of its messages.²⁹ As we in the case of Iraq are speaking about a long-term, extensive and a rather compulsive propaganda exposure, it can be concluded that the issue here is not whether people have or have not noticed messages. Still, factors like message relevance and personal/group interests may have decided if some messages have been paid more attention than others. A rule of thumb is that messages should be in line with already established norms and beliefs in the society in order to be effective. The reason is that people have a tendency to first and foremost adhere to such messages, while novelties are often ignored. Norms are usually connected to communities, and people are considered to be inclined to conform to the norms of the groups they belong to. The sender may take advantage of this principle. For instance, Jowett and

²³ See McQuail, 1994, pp 348-50. Or see Jowett & O'Donnell, 1986, pp 14-15, 26.

²⁴ Thompson, John B., 1995, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*, Polity Press, Cambridge, p 11.

²⁵ McQuail, 1994, p 349.

²⁶ See Jowett & O'Donnell, 1986, pp 16, 117.

²⁷ McQuail, 1994, pp 333, 339, 348.

²⁸ See for instance McQuail, 1994, p 340.

²⁹ See McQuail, 1994, pp 347-8.

O'Donnell explain that group norms may be exploited in propaganda in order to strengthen peoples' prejudices and self-interests.³⁰

The sender - receiver relation is also significant. The characters of the sender and the channels used in the influence process play an important role. If the receivers feel they can identify themselves with the sender, the sender's chance to be adhered to increases, and vice versa. The possibility to influence the audience may also increase respectively decrease in accordance with the consistency between the sender's interests and those of the receivers.³¹ Further, trust and credibility are crucial factors. According to Yariv Tsfati in 'Media Scepticism and Climate of Opinion Perception' (2003) trust is often forgotten as a variable in effect research. Trust can be described as a question of expectations based on previous experiences. For the receivers there is no other tool than experience to employ in order to evaluate how reliable something claimed or promised is and how trustworthy the source is to be viewed.³²

Previous experiences are also significant for the filter condition 'perception'. This condition is very much an issue about interpretations of messages. A message is viewed to have an intended interpretation - the version preferred by its sender. Roughly, the receiver may choose to either accept or reject this interpretation. However, all messages are open for *many* interpretations. The receiver may modify the message before accepting it. It is therefore often more accurate to regard acceptance and rejection as a question of how consistent the receiver's interpretation is with the intended version. Interpretations are often discussed on the basis of individuals, but groups are still relevant. Members of the same groupings are inclined to make similar understandings of messages, at least to a certain degree. There are several theories that seek to explain interpretation processes, each of them emphasising specific important variables such as gender, previous experiences, culture, class belonging etc. In short, we can draw the broader conclusion that interpreters are not isolated actors. They are formed and affected by the society in large and by their positions in it.³³

1. 3 Aim

The purpose of this essay is to examine consistencies and inconsistencies between the main propaganda messages of the Iraqi Ba'th regime and the selected blog-writers' perceptions of matters relating to themes in these messages. This is done on the basis of the assumption that the explanations of the consistencies/inconsistencies, seen as potential propaganda effects, are to be found in the bloggers' group situation. By applying the rules of thumb and the thesis given in the theoretical framework concerning aspects such as interests, norms and sender-receiver relations, my analysis is to answer the question: Which factors of the group situation have been the most dominating facilitators/barriers to the propaganda messages?

³⁰ Jowett & O'Donnell, 1986, pp 27-9.

³¹ See for instance McQuail, 1994, pp 339-42.

³² Tsfati, Yariv, 2003, 'Media Scepticism and Climate of Opinion Perception', *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, vol 15:1, pp 65, 67.

³³ Chandler, Daniel, 'The Active Reader'. <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Modules/MC10220/aktive.html>.
Or McQuail, 1994, pp 53-4.

Typologically, the effects studied in the analysis may broadly be identified as belonging to the cognitive and affective categories, and more precise, as reality defining and construction of meaning effects, which concern receivers' understandings of the world and frames of interpretations.³⁴ In a Ba'thi context one may surely also speak of social control effects, but such are at first hand a matter of behaviour,³⁵ which is not dealt with in this work. A study on cognitions and affections is here assumed to better approach the more overall question of the essay: What kind of propaganda heritage is there which is meaningful to talk about, and in what contexts?

The analysis is not claimed to give a complete picture of neither the propaganda heritage nor the bloggers' group situation. The essay is highly dependent on matters discussed in the blogs. Moreover, Ba'thi propaganda is a comprehensive subject ranging from the 70s media campaigns supporting the regime's efforts at erasing illiteracy in Iraq to the glorification of Saddam Husain's leadership and persona. The focus is therefore on message themes commonly pointed out by scholars as important and characteristic. Among these I have further prioritised messages reflecting matters of present issues regarding the current situation in Iraq, for instance the increasing sectarianism, the relations with the neighbouring states, and the view on 'the Other'. The propaganda messages are reviewed in chapter 2 (see 2.2). No propaganda material of the Ba'th regime is investigated in the essay, the account and the discussion is solely based on previous research.

Iraq is often studied and discussed in relation to the population's ethnical, religious and tribal structures. Therefore it is important to understand what *group* refers to in the term 'group situation'. The group is the object of study and may not necessarily reflect a segment of people who consider themselves a grouping. They are defined as such by the investigator on basis of factors they have in common making it relevant to study them as a collective. As for the bloggers they are to represent a group particularly defined by class belonging (middle class) and living place (Baghdad). Being all Arab Iraqi blog-writers the group is also defined by ethnicity. Further aspects can be added and the exact definition is accounted for in the description of the selection of the blogs/bloggers given in 1.4. The discussion in the analysis and the conclusions drawn only relate to this defined specific grouping, even though some aspects may indicate relevance on a more general level.

1. 4 Method and Material

For the analysis six blogs have been picked out as sources. The number may appear to be small. However, I have made the judgement that if a reliable study is to be achieved each blogger must be followed for a relatively long time, approximately 6-12 months. A larger number would thereby imply a material too extensive to handle. Moreover, the blog-sources are not analysed by comparing one with another, but by studying factors and aspects generally shared by the writers. Still, divergences will be observed.

The selection of the blogs/bloggers was based on two main principles: a) They should all share a common base that was to ensure the choice of suitable sources for the study; b) They should differ from each other in gender, age, opinions, personality etc, and by this represent different types of

³⁴ See McQuail, 1994, p 338.

³⁵ See McQuail, 1994, p 337.

writers found in the Iraqi blogosphere. To reduce the risk of identifying perceptions developed within a post-Ba'thi context as propaganda effects, the selection was also partly guided by the idea that those who had started to write at an early date should be prioritised. However, this in turn entailed a risk that bloggers from the same circle of friends (or even family) were picked out. Therefore some later blogs had to be given preference.

The common base used in the first stage of the selection was founded on the following: 1) The bloggers should live in Iraq and have done so all their life or at least the larger part of it. It was also essential that they had lived in Iraq during the last decade of the Ba'thi era. This was to ensure that they had been exposed to the propaganda not only for a long time but also recently. 2) They ought to be Arab Iraqis and living in Baghdad to suite the focus on group situation. 3) The blogs should be of the kind known as personal blogs in contrast to other types like media- or corporate blogs.³⁶ For the analysis it was vital that the bloggers only represented themselves and not a political party, interest group, organisation etc. It was also important that their writings had at least to some extent the nature of a diary discussing matters much on the basis of their own experiences, notions, likes and dislikes, hopes and dreams.

After the first round of selection by the principles of the common base above, six bloggers (three male and three female) were picked out in a second round because of their differences. Hence, the bloggers reflect a homogenous group of middle class Arab Iraqis in Baghdad but they also represent a great variation within this segment. They differ in age, interests, professions, writing styles, and opinions, just to mention some aspects. The six blog-writers are: Faiza (*A Family in Baghdad*); Ibn al-Rafidain (*Ibn al-Rafidain*); Meemo (*Iraqi Rocker*); Mohammed (*Iraq the Model*); Riverbend (*Baghdad Burning*); The Woman (*An Iraqi Tear*). A short presentation of each one is found in the appendix. The source material embraces the first 6-12 months of their bloggings, implying a variation in time. The exact dates (year and month) are also given in the appendix.

Examining the blog material I have searched for patterns of thought relevant in the context of messages propagated by the Ba'thists. A pattern is here equivalent to an attitude, perception or the like found in more than one source and expressed more than once by the individual blog writer with some time between the occasions. The identification of such patterns has been crucial as they constitute a cornerstone of the method applied in the analysis in chapter 3. But it has been important far more than for structural reasons alone. The blog material must be viewed for what it is, i.e. produced by Iraqis writing as private persons who have experienced a long period of wars, dictatorship and sufferings caused by the international sanctions. Today they live in a very stressful situation, including great insecurity in the streets, occupation, high rates of unemployment, major shortcomings in the sectors of civil service, and general uncertainty concerning the future. They often use their blogs as channels to ventilate emotions like anger and grief, as well as happiness. Therefore, the identification of patterns is significant to ensure that discussed attitudes and perceptions in the analysis really are the bloggers' and not impulses in a state of frustration.

³⁶ For different types of blogs, see Wikipedia at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog>

In all, six patterns of thought were distinguished. Each of them reflects consistency or inconsistency with a specific message or theme of the Ba'thi propaganda, and thus indicates *potential* effects. Notice the stressed term. The general line in the essay is one urging for carefulness when dealing with effects of mass communication. Especially long term effects, which here is the case, are a matter with great uncertainties. As will be shown in the analysis it is, despite the domination of the Ba'thi propaganda, extremely difficult to separate its impacts from other factors of influence.

Analysing the patterns of thought I have searched for factors of the group situation which can explain the consistencies and inconsistencies reflected in them. The blogs are, of course, the most important sources for this search, but the study of the group situation does not start from scratch. Preceding the analysis the contextual framework in chapter 2 is highly adjusted to define the Arab middle class in Baghdad giving the study a platform to work from.

Like the patterns of thought chapter 2 constitutes a cornerstone of the method. Besides framing the Baghdadi Arab middle class it includes an account of the propaganda messages with which the patterns are compared. This chapter is of course not based on the blog-sources but on studies by scholars and other observers. In section 2.1 'Political and Social Overview' Marion Farouk-Sluglett's & Peter Sluglett's *Iraq since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (2001) and *The Near East since the First World War* (1996) by M. E. Yapp have been used to a large degree. Annual reports on Iraq by *International Press Institute* and *Reporters without Borders* have also been valuable sources. The review of the propaganda messages and objectives in section 2.2 is notably based on the works by Bengio and Davis initially referred to (see 1.1). The two complement each other quite well. In *Saddam's Word* (1998) Bengio analyses the language of the Iraqi Ba'th investigating newspaper articles, speeches and various publications of the regime. In *Memories of State* (2005) Davis focuses on myth-making and history memory in the nation-state building in Iraq studying a wide spectrum of history and cultural productions of intellectuals, students, journalists and the Ba'thi state institutions. His analysed source material includes not only texts but also monuments, arts and crafts. Al-Khalil's *Republic of Fear* (1990) has further, but to a lesser extent, been used in the account.

Last, but not least, a third cornerstone is the theoretical framework. It serves as a guide or map reminding of the factors and aspects that should be taken into account, and supports the conclusions made.

2. Contextual Framework

This chapter includes two sections: Political and Social Overview (2.1) and Messages and Objectives (2.2). Both are adjusted to fit the analysis. Section 2.1 is founded on the following factors, viewed as a general base for the bloggers' group situation, and as a background to the propaganda messages: the general political climate and features of political life in Iraq; the ba'thisation; the modernisation process; the wars and the sanctions; and the situation for media and information. Section 2.2 is a brief review of the major lines of the Ba'thi propaganda with focus on messages reflecting issues which are dealt with in the blog-sources, and thereby also discussed in the analysis.

2. 1 Political and Social Overview

The political history of modern Iraq is an issue more about personalities, kinships and regionalism than about parties, politics and ideology. It is also much about violence and bloodsheds both in the higher echelons and in the streets. At the time of the two closely following coups in July 1968, which brought the Ba'th (or more correctly a Ba'thi faction dominated by Takritis) into power, Iraq was a politically turbulent and coup-ridden country.³⁷ The regime, initially under the presidency of Ahmad al-Bakr (1968-79) and later of Saddam Husain (1979-2003), came to be far the most long lived rule the Republic of Iraq has had. In that sense it managed to bring stability. However, this was done by either eliminating or enrolling its rivals, and by continuing to brutally suppress all existing and potential oppositional elements.³⁸ Further, the stability was rather superficial. Within the political establishment there were power struggles, and plots (real and fabricated) were now and then announced to have been discovered.³⁹ Among the Kurds in Northern Iraq full control was never achieved, and for the governance in Baghdad the Kurdish question remained a problem throughout the years.⁴⁰ Also other groupings challenged the regime from time to time by uprisings, assassination attempts and other forms of activism.⁴¹ Yet, fragmented into smaller factions often hostile to each

³⁷ For further reading on the following issues see Marion Farouk-Sluglett & Peter Sluglett, 2001, *Iraq since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship*, I.B. Tauris Publishers, London: the political intrigues during the rule of Qasim (1958-63), pp 58-76, 82-4; the coup in 1963 and its aftermath, pp 85-7, 92-3; the rule of the 'Arif brothers (1963-8), pp 92-106; the coups in 1968, pp 112-6. For further reading on political life and the involvement of the Iraqi Army in politics during the Hashemite era (1921-58) see Yapp M. E., 1996, *The Near East since the First World War* (2nd ed.), Longman Ltd., London & New York, pp 78-80.

³⁸ See Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 2001, pp 116-23.

³⁹ This became such a habit that the Baghddadis began to joke that someone actually had found a man who was *not* involved in a plot. See William R. Polk, 2005, *Understanding Iraq*, HarperCollins Publisher Inc., New York, p 123. Also see Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 2001, pp 121-2, 160-4; Yapp, 1996, p 243.

⁴⁰ For further reading see for instance Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 2001, pp 126-32, 140-4, 158-60, 187-90, 269-70.

⁴¹ The regime had in particular difficulties with the Shi'a Islamist party al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya responsible for several attacks, for instance the bombing at Baghdad University in 1980 targeting Tariq Aziz, and the assassination attempts on Saddam Husain in 1982 and 1987. See for instance Mahan Abedin, 'Dossier: Hezb al-Daawa al-Islamiyya', *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, vol 5 no 6, June 2003. Although perhaps a less immediate threat to the regime compared to the activism of al-Da'wa, the bomb-and-sabotage campaign of Iyad Alawi and his Iraqi National Accord in 1990-95 may also be observed. See Joel Brinkley, 'The Reach of War: New Premier; Ex-C.I.A Aides Say Iraq Leader Helped Agency in 90's Attacks', *The New York Times*, June 9, 2004.

other, and, naturally, increasingly weakened and operated from abroad due to the repression, the opposition seldom threatened the very existence of the Ba'thi leadership.⁴²

At any rate, the fragile stability surely made the regime constantly on its guard and preoccupied with its own safety. Of the measures undertaken perhaps the creation of institutions for intelligence and security like the *Mukhabarat* (the party Intelligence) comes to mind at first hand.⁴³ Besides this, scholars often point out the techniques employed by the regime related to its use of ruling in accordance with the principle of divide-and-rule. The idea is that by atomising the society and nursing divisions among the population the citizens can be made more directly dependent on the state as individuals or as smaller groups, which is thought to reduce the risk of a growing unified opposition. Examples of such methods are the ba'thisation and Saddam Husain's re-tribalisation of Iraq.⁴⁴

For the leadership the Ba'th Party was more a tool than a cause. Although the regime was a regional faction, which under Saddam Husain became even further narrowed to himself and his family, the rule was always presented as that of the Ba'th Party in whole.⁴⁵ In the process known as the ba'thisation the party was made the strongest institution and integrated into every sector of the society. Membership was required in many occupations and good contacts within the organisation were more or less a necessity for any kind of advancement. As the regime's roughness towards suspected opponents became evident, many Iraqis most likely also joined the party as a safety measure. Already in the mid 70s the rate of members had grown (from about 5,000 in 1968) to about 1/2 million, and in 1984 the number had become 1½ million. For the majority the membership was only a formality, but doubtless the Ba'thi ideology had also attracted some people.⁴⁶

In 1972 the Iraqi Petrol Company was nationalised and the following year the rest of the oil industry was taken into state ownership. This, in addition to the oil boom in the 70s, made it possible to perform large development programs. The public sector expanded considerably, investments were put into the heavy industry and the infrastructure, and great progress was achieved in the fields of health, housing and education. Many of the reform programs had been on the agenda since the Revolution in 1958 and were already initiated, but, due to the political instability, had been inefficiently pursued.⁴⁷

The development projects were often ideologically defined. For instance, the Ba'th Party viewed illiteracy not only as a social problem but also as an obstacle to its objectives. Therefore illiteracy had to be erased. Likewise the emancipation of women was considered a necessity for a prosperous and reunited Arab nation. Ideologically defined or not, still the reforms were for the great benefit of the

⁴² The main exception is the simultaneous rebellions among the Shi'is in the South and among the Kurds in the North in 1991.

⁴³ See al-Khalil, 1990, pp 12-6.

⁴⁴ Two major patterns of tribal structures developed in Iraq under Ba'th: étatist tribalism and social tribalism. The first refers to the tribal lineages and culture integrated into the state during the 70s and 80s in a process promoting certain Sunni Arab clans and relatives of the elite. The second refers to a form of reconstructed tribal groups in the urban centres acting as an extension of the state functioning as tax collectors and law enforcement. The system was spread across the sub-communities and was developed in order to compensate the regime's loss of capacity during the 80s and 90s. See Faleh A. Jabar, 2000, 'Shaykhs and Ideologues: Detribalization and Retribalization in Iraq, 1968-1998', *Middle East Report*, no 215.

⁴⁵ Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 2001, pp 135-6.

⁴⁶ See Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 2001, pp 135-7. For the figures, see al-Khalil, 1990, p 105; Yapp, 1996, p 241.

⁴⁷ See Yapp, 1996, pp 244-5.

Iraqi population and had a tremendous impact on the overall society. The law of compulsory school for all children, the comprehensive educational campaigns reaching every corner of the country, and the state's covering of financial costs at all stages of education resulted not only in an almost eradicated illiteracy in 1990 but also in a growing well educated and skilled middle class, a feature reaching beyond the gender borders. The gigantic development plan of the Ba'th made the need for manpower urgent, which further encouraged the women's emancipation and improved status, as this required that the women took an active part in the society.⁴⁸

An important part of the regime's modernisation project was the formation of a national identity that could embrace all the ethnical and religious sub-communities in Iraq and constitute a platform for mass mobilisation. The task was in no way unproblematic. On the one hand the regime was bound to the Ba'thi pan-Arab ideology and had to meet rivalry from other pan-Arabists, on the other hand it could not afford to further alienate the large segments of Kurds, Shi'is and members of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), who opposed the very idea of an Arab reunion or were little interested in it. Trying to overcome the contradiction, the regime came up with an Iraqi centred pan-Arabic identity which was promoted by lavish investments in cultural productions. Appropriating history and folklore in a nation-state which was still young but with roots in ancient civilisations, the regime also addressed a growing interest in such matters, especially among the educated urban middle class.⁴⁹

The formation of a national identity played, like the propaganda measures in general, an important role in the divide-and-rule strategy of the Ba'th. It seems to be commonly agreed on that, even if the regime put efforts into finding an all-Iraqi formula, the aim was not to unify the population otherwise than under the Ba'thi leadership and in structures of a social pecking order. The regime was thereby imaged as a necessity to keep the nation together. Consequently national loyalty was equalised with loyalty to the regime, being the head of the Iraqi 'tent' gathering all the domestic sub-communities. But this also meant that different ethnical and religious affinities were tolerated as long as the all-Iraqi affinity was prioritised.⁵⁰

In 1980 Iraq went to war against Iran, a war that would go on for eight years, and, if in anything, resulted in exhaustion and high casualty rates on both sides. The degree of the Ba'th's public support before the outbreak is uncertain, though, reasonably the rule had become increasingly accepted during the 70s thanks to the general improvement of every day life. The war caused severe strains on the political and economical capacity of the leadership, and it probably seriously damaged the regime's legitimacy. It was a military conflict that became highly internationalised. Most states sided with Iraq, the main exceptions being Syria and Libya. The Arab Gulf-states, the US, the USSR among others shared the Iraqi interest in preventing Iran to export its Islamic Revolution and therefore supplied and supported the Baghdad regime.⁵¹ The Shi'is in Iraq, contrary to what was feared, showed little interest in the Iranians' Islamic trend. However, the clandestine party al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya, which had

⁴⁸ See Alya Sousa, 1982, 'The Eradication of Illiteracy in Iraq', *Iraq: The Contemporary State*, (ed. Tim Niblock), Croom Helm Ltd., London, pp 102-5; and, in the same work, see Amal al-Sharqi, 'The Emancipation of Iraqi Women', pp 74-87.

⁴⁹ See Davis, 2005, pp 159-70.

⁵⁰ See Bengio, 1998, pp 89-92.

⁵¹ Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 2001, pp 259-62.

declared itself a supporter of the new leadership in Teheran already in 1979, intensified its struggle against the Ba'th. As for the majority, Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett remark, it seems that even if the domestic regime was disliked and even hated, the prospect of its replacement by something like the rule in Iran was to most Iraqis, if not more, equally unpalatable.⁵² Nevertheless, the Ba'th continued to regard the Shi'is with suspicion. Mass executions and disappearances among the Shi'is, like among the Kurds and the members of the ICP, were reported.⁵³

During the Iraq-Iran War it must have become increasingly evident to the Iraqis that Saddam Husain was little prepared to share his power with anyone. In the end of the 80s he had in practice abolished the central role of the Ba'th Party and rested the rule on his (extended) family. The development and promotion of the cult around his persona took such proportion that it most likely alienated the leadership in the eyes of the majority, including former supporters. The socialistic line of the regime was abandoned. Surely not the only, but an important, reason for this was that the burden on the public sector had to be reduced to meet the economic crisis caused by the war. In a rather contradictory fashion to the centralisation, Saddam undertook some measures of liberalisation in the fields of economy and politics. The economic reforms encouraged a further extension of the private sector. However, this had little improving effects on the economy. Concerning the political reforms, they appear to have been purposed to be a smoke screen more than anything else and did in no way change the fact that Iraq was ruled more or less by one man only.⁵⁴

In August 1991, not much longer than two years after peace had been settled with Iran, Iraq invaded Kuwait. In short, the action was condemned by the whole international community; the UN declared comprehensive economic sanctions against Iraq; in January 1991 the US and its allies began to bomb 'strategic' targets within Iraq, causing large numbers of civilian deaths and considerable damage to the infrastructure. The bombings were followed by a ground offensive; and in late February, when the Iraqi troops had been driven out from Kuwait, cease-fire was declared. A few days later uprisings against the Baghdad regime broke out in Kurdistan and in Southern Iraq with attacks on local Ba'thi officials and their families. The regime managed to suppress the revolt responding to it with exceptional brutality, including indiscriminating mass executions and widespread destruction of Shi'i shrines.⁵⁵

The sanctions against Iraq, which came to endure until the invasion of the US-led Coalition in 2003, had devastating impacts on the society, but hardly any effect on the regime. On the contrary, members of the elite made fortunes, notably on the black market, and lived in luxury. Meanwhile the majority of the Iraqi citizens suffered from shortages of basic food-stuffs and medicines, resulting in widespread malnutrition and deaths in diseases which in the previous advanced Iraqi health system would have been of little seriousness. Without question the sanctions hit those already less fortunate hardest, though, caused severe misery also among the middle class. Because of the hyper-inflation many families had to sell their possessions to survive, and most people needed to seek additional

⁵² Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 2001, p 258.

⁵³ Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 2001, pp 263-4.

⁵⁴ See Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 2001, pp 274-7.

⁵⁵ Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 2001, pp 281-3.

employment to buy enough food. There was a general decline in the civil service, in which the deterioration, besides in the healthcare, was particularly noticeable in the provision of education.⁵⁶

During the sanctions Iraq became in many ways an isolated country, a feature that is especially reflected in the media sphere. While the situation for mass communication underwent almost revolutionary changes in the rest of the Arab World after the Gulf War in 1991, the development in Iraq was rather the reverse. Yet, the situation can not be described otherwise than as extremely bad during the whole Ba'thi era. The flows of information were tightly controlled by the state, and all institutions for mass communication were linked to the regime. The Ba'thi propaganda machine included a row of outlets, including the educational system, arts and crafts, TV-stations, museums, newspapers and magazines, organisations for various professionals, just to mention some of them.⁵⁷ To keep media workers, authors, intellectuals and others to the official lines the regime employed a reward-and-punishment system which encouraged self-censorship. Occasionally there were even more or less news blackouts on whole issues, for instance sensitive questions regarding the Kurds and the Shi'is.⁵⁸ However, among journalists and scholars there were techniques to apply to bring forward criticism and alternative views in subtle ways.⁵⁹

Even if the regime's control over information indeed was comprehensive there are some aspects pointing at a not *entirely* hopeless situation regarding the Iraqis possibilities to receive alternative pictures of reality. Iraq was not totally unaffected by the forces of globalisation. In Baghdad some broke the ban on satellite dishes, which was only allowed for high ranking officials, and installed home-made dishes hiding them on rooftops or in backyards. How common this was is hard to say but apparently common enough for Saddam to officially remind the public about the ban in 2002 invoking religious justification for the rule. Further, broadcastings from abroad, for instance the Arabic speaking programs from *BBC*, *Sawa* and *Radio Monte Carlo*, could be received even by small transistor radios. In the field of entertainment the restrictions were not so hard as for news and political content. Even though the domestic television devoted much time to cover every movement of Saddam Husain, American and Egyptian movies and soap operas were also broadcasted.⁶⁰ The internet was initially not allowed but in 2000 some internet centres were opened, the first in Baghdad. Yet, the access was restricted and the fees were high.⁶¹

2. 2 Messages and Objectives

In the theoretical framework it was mentioned that propaganda is always in form and content adjusted to fit the specific situation. The Ba'thi propaganda is no exception. The development of purposes, themes and character reflects general changes of circumstances and needs in the political, economical and social spheres. For instance, Bengio remarks that the regime's pan-Arab rhetoric underwent such

⁵⁶ See Colin Rowat, 'How the Sanctions Hurt Iraq', *Middle East Report Online*, August 2, 2001. Also see Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 2001, pp 293-4; Davis, 2005, p 232.

⁵⁷ See Bengio, 1998, pp 7-9, 50-1.

⁵⁸ See for instance Bengio, 1998, p 109.

⁵⁹ See Séverine Cazes, 2003, 'The Iraqi Media: 25 years of Relentless Repression', *Reporters without Borders*, p 7; Bengio, 1998, p 63; Davis, 2005, p 10-11.

⁶⁰ Cazes, 2003, pp 7-10.

⁶¹ 'World Press Freedom Review: Iraq', 2000, *International Press Institute*.

http://www.freemedia.at/cms/ipi/freedom_detail.html?country=KW0001/KW0004/KW0093/&year=2000

reflexive development. During the 80s the central term (Arab) ‘unity’ (*wahda*) began to be increasingly replaced by lesser committing words like ‘solidarity’ (*tadamun*) and ‘cooperation’ (*ta‘awmun*). According to Bengio this mirrored a sobering up after the failures to come to an agreement on an Iraqi-Syrian union. Most likely it also reflected the regime’s dependence on Saudi and Kuwaiti economic assistance in the war against Iran. On the other hand, Iraq’s significant role in the Arab World was highly emphasised during the war. Imaged as a mighty dam defending the Arab nation against an outburst of hatred from the east, the Iraqis fought the Iranian enemy not only on behalf of themselves but of all Arabs. Further Iraq was pictured as the cradle and standard bearer of ‘true’ Arabism. This in contrast to the regimes in Syria and Libya who acted against the Arab nation (having sided with Iran) - their Arabism was ‘a fraud’. The Gulf War in 1990-1 made it clear that unity among the Arab states no longer existed, not even a cosmetic one, and consequently there were no more references to the Arab *wahda*. Instead the Gulf War was declared a *jihad* aiming at the liberation of Mekka and Medina, which had fallen into the hands of Christian infidels assisted by Moslem collaborators, notably the Saudis, who were in reality no more than *munafiqun* (hypocrites).⁶² Yet, the regime did in no way drop the entire pan-Arab rhetoric, and apparently references, for instance to the liberation of Palestine, were still regarded to be effective propaganda issues.⁶³

The use of Islamic themes underwent a similar development, but in the opposite direction. Until 1977, following the socialistic and secular approach of the Ba‘th regime, Islam was more or less ignored for propaganda purposes. During the 80s it increasingly became employed as a theme. The Iraq-Iran war was promoted as a modern *al-Qadisiyya*,⁶⁴ and Saddam Husain adopted a defender-of-Islam role particularly addressing the broader layers of the domestic Shi‘is, aiming at their support. 1989 and onwards there was a period of deliberate Islamic flag-waving.⁶⁵ Roughly coinciding with the sanction years this last period is one of growing religiosity among middle class Iraqis, according to Davis, who thinks that this was a result of the overall desperate situation. The religious trend was further followed up in the mid 90s by imposing Islamic punishments for certain crimes, like amputation for theft, closing nightclubs, and banning public sale of alcohol. In contrast, and far from reflecting any Islamic norms, the Saddam family, his son ‘Uday in particular, lived a decadent and rather scandalous life.⁶⁶

Among the many examples of gaps between actions and words the widest is probably the one of ‘democracy’. While totally denying the citizens all the commonly agreed elements defining a democratic rule, the regime always presented itself as such and claimed that it represented a truer democracy than anywhere else.⁶⁷ Also this term underwent changes in meaning and use. In 1968 Iraq was proclaimed to be a ‘popular democratic state’, an expression borrowed from the communist

⁶² Bengio, 1998, pp 45-8, 92-4, 187.

⁶³ See for instance Saddam Husain’s open letter to the Iraqi people and the Arab nation published in *al-Quds al-Arabi*, April 28, 2003. English translation published by *The Middle East Media Research Institute*, April 30, 2003. <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=country&Area=Iraq&ID=SP49603>

⁶⁴ Moslem legendary victory over the Persians in 637.

⁶⁵ Bengio, 1998, p 176. Also Davis, 2005, pp 189-91.

⁶⁶ Davis, 2005, pp 132-7.

⁶⁷ Bengio, 1998, pp 60-1.

political idiom. It later became replaced by terms such as ‘revolutionary democracy’ or ‘Ba‘thi democracy’, the latter preferred by Saddam Husain.⁶⁸

Although one may distinguish changes in choice of themes and terms, and trace these to specific purposes of the time, in the end the main objective of the propaganda was to secure and legitimise the regime’s power position and actions. The close relation and interaction between the propaganda campaigns and the divide-and-rule strategy of the Ba‘th is often pointed out by scholars. Davis explains that it is common that authoritarian rulers aim at developing feelings of paranoia, xenophobia and distrust among the citizens. In Iraq this was done by portraying the country as continuously victimised by internal and external enemies, a method purposed to reduce the public’s incentive to develop an understanding of other cultures and societies both inside and outside the country. The Iraqi citizens would further be fostered to be constantly vigilant for traitors, and the different ethnical and religious communities would view one another with mistrust, Davis says. By stigmatising some groups as having nothing modern or progressive to contribute to the society other groupings would have little interest to interact with them, making it difficult for oppositional movements to find support beyond the ethno-religious borders.⁶⁹

Also Bengio points out that the constant stress on threats from ever-present enemies is one of the most striking features of the Ba‘thi discourse. This stress often came hand in hand with the regime’s glorification of force and militarism, as the use of violence could be sanctioned by the need to fight the state’s enemies, which there were many. The main threats, however, were identified as coming externally from Western imperialists, Zionists, and Iran, and domestically from the Kurds and the Shi‘is. These were further imaged to be connected with each other and involved in a vast conspiracy. Bengio concludes that in this way the propaganda created an atmosphere of permanent crises which in turn enabled the regime to mobilise greater public support.⁷⁰

Even though the Kurds and the Shi‘is in the Ba‘thi view endangered both Iraqi and Arab national unity, these two groupings were seldom directly pointed out. Instead the regime used subtle ways with hidden messages to attack and alienate them, and usually there were a great circumlocution when referring to the Kurdish and Shi‘i communities. Hints and code words were commonly used. As for the Shi‘is, it came to a point when the very word *Shi‘i* became almost taboo even in more neutral contexts. When it was used, it was with references to the Shi‘is in Lebanon or Iran. The domestic Shi‘is the regime preferred to call *al-madhab al-Jafariyya* (or simply *al-Jafariyya*),⁷¹ regarded as a more convenient name as it did not stress the communal difference as much as the term *Shi‘i*. The name was no innovation, but was introduced in 1736 by Nadir Shah of Persia in an attempt to bridge the gap between Sunni and Shi‘a by declaring the latter a school alongside the four Sunni ones.⁷²

As a part of the theme of eternal enemies we find the concept of *shu‘ubiyya*, which associates to racism and hatred towards Arabs. The term has often been employed in the political rhetoric of pan-Arabists

⁶⁸ Bengio, 1998, pp 57, 60.

⁶⁹ Davis, 2005, pp 6-7.

⁷⁰ Bengio, 1998, pp125-6.

⁷¹ Refers to the sixth Imam, Ja‘far al-Sadiq, who is considered the chief author of Shi‘i religious laws and precepts.

⁷² Bengio, 1998, pp 98-9.

in order to verbally attack enemies of the Arabism. It refers back to the Abbasid period and to the first movement known as *shu'ubiyya*, an opposition to the Arab superiority claiming Persian or non-Arab supremacy. However, it has been argued that the movement in reality did actually call for equality between Moslems.⁷³

Whatever the original movement's claims may have been, *shu'ubiyya* has always a strongly negative connotation when used by Ba'thists or other pan-Arabists. It is rather difficult to get a clear picture of what the concept exactly embraces and exactly who may be labelled *shu'ubi*. According to al-Khalil the definition was intentionally left vague. He describes the concept as functioning as an antithesis to Arabism, a 'satanic principle' which Arabists needed to leave blurred in contrast to their own ideology.

"Ideologically, *shu'ubism* is best understood as an idea that had to be invented whenever Arabism or Arabness became a problem: it is the idea of the enemy from within, the insidious, ubiquitous [ubiquitous] agent of a hostile outside whose presence is needed to reassure believers of what it is they are supposed to have faith in. God always came paired up with the devil,..."⁷⁴

The vagueness of the definition made it possible to use and re-use it in accordance with the enemy of the specific time. In Iraq the Ba'th Party applied it on almost all its enemies and rivals: communists, Iran, Asad in Syria, imperialists, Zionists, Shi'is, Kurds etc – they all practised *shu'ubism*. Before the coup 1968 the concept was especially used in order to de-legitimise the ICP. During the war against Iran it took a central place in the public discourse and served to demonise Khomeini, the Iranians and Iraqi Shi'a Islamists like al-Da'wa. After the war the Iraqis continued to be constantly reminded to remain on guard against *shu'ubiyya*, since it was still employed by 'political, sectarian and racist organisations which feared and opposed the Arab mission'. Domestically that meant the Shi'is and the Kurds.⁷⁵ The term was, however, especially applied on the Shi'is. Scholars appear to generally agree on that *shu'ubiyya* in this case in fact not exclusively indicated specific factions but the whole Iraqi Shi'a community, religious and secular Shi'is alike.⁷⁶

Davis considers that the regime's overall different relationship and treatment of Sunnis and Shi'is respectively, have resulted in various degrees of integration in the two communities of the state-sponsored historical memories and worldview. In theory many memories of both pre-Islamic and Islamic themes could be accepted by Sunnis as well as Shi'is. Though, rewards, like increased political power or material benefits, must be offered, if state sponsored historical memories and worldviews are to be adopted. Consequently, these will not be deeply established within groupings offered few or none rewards. For the (Arab) members of the Sunni and the Shi'a communities the prospects of rewards were different. While Sunni Arabs (especially those with a rural and tribal background) were offered privileges by virtue of belonging to this group, Shi'is who achieved status and power within the state did so as individuals rather than as Shi'is.⁷⁷ Bengio draws pretty much the same conclusion about varying degree of message acceptance among the different religious communities. Holding her discussion when the Ba'thists were still in power, she reminds though of the uncertainties regarding

⁷³ See Bengio, 1998, pp 103-4. Or see Davis, 2005, pp 184-8. Also see al-Khalil, 1990, pp 216-20.

⁷⁴ al-Khalil, 1990, p 219.

⁷⁵ Bengio, 1998, pp 98, 104-5.

⁷⁶ See for instance Davis, 2005, p 188. Or see Bengio, 1998, pp 105-6.

⁷⁷ Davis, 2005, pp 183, 274-5.

opinions of the Iraqi Shi'is. They had no representative political organisations or mouthpieces except those in exile, and it was difficult to say how reflective their attitudes were for the wider Shi'i population inside Iraq.⁷⁸ Other scholars generally warn against exaggerating the differences between the Sunnis and the Shi'is. For instance, Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett state that one of the most persistent misconceptions about Iraq is the belief that there is a fundamental division between Sunnis and Shi'is. Instead, it is far more meaningful to talk about a division between a minority of power holders from Takrit and the majority of the disenfranchised Iraqi people.⁷⁹

In Iraq it became common practise to exploit and stimulate fear and hatred for imperialism. Especially during the first decade of Ba'thi rule it was done to mobilise mass support of the public. For instance, in 1973 Saddam Husain declared that the central task of education was to define the country's traditional enemies and teach the children to hate imperialism. On another occasion he put forward another aim – to learn the pupils in early ages the habit of discipline and order. This was required because the students later in life may have to bear arms opposing an imperialistic or other enemy.⁸⁰

Various Iraqi oppositional groupings, the US, Israel, and Iran were all identified as imperialists. In time it became clearer that the US was the principal imperialist power, though Israel and Iran were still viewed as sharing and facilitating the Americans' imperialistic interests, i.e. to prevent an Arab unity and to dominate or control the oil resources in the region.⁸¹

The greatest danger of all came from the Zionist-imperialist alliance. The emergence of Israel was viewed as a result of the symbiosis between Zionists, having an imperialistic ideology, and imperialistic interests of the West. The idea of a Zionist entity in Palestine was that it should serve these interests and keep the Arabs divided, backward and dependent. The Arabs therefore had to fight Israel in every way - economically, culturally, politically, technologically etc. Perhaps needless to say, Israel was denied as a legitimate state by the Ba'thists who used a number of different terms and ways to express this standpoint and to propagate contempt mixed with fear for Zionism.⁸²

There was also an Israeli-Iranian alliance, and the Jewish-Persian links went back to antiquity. This alliance was based on a common hatred towards Arabs in general and Iraqis in particular. But there were also shared interests behind it. Both were agents of imperialism and sought to strengthen it, both were hostile to Palestine, and both planned to divide the Arab nation between them. This was the foundations of the Iranians' cooperation with Israel under the Shah, and the bond had grown even stronger under Khomeini.⁸³

While Zionism and Western imperialism were quite distant threats, the Iranian enemy was very close and always ready to attack Iraq. The fear was fed both by historical reminiscences and by events occurring during the Ba'thi rule. Iraq was in disputes with Iran about several issues, but worst of all was Khomeini's ambition to export his Islamic revolution. The Ba'th made efforts to emphasise the

⁷⁸ Bengio, 1998, p 98.

⁷⁹ Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 2001, pp 299-300.

⁸⁰ Bengio, 1998, p 127.

⁸¹ See Bengio, 1998, pp 129-33.

⁸² See Bengio, 1998, pp 134-9.

⁸³ Bengio, 1998, p 137.

linguistic and racial differences and picture the Iranian-Iraqi conflict as a struggle between Persians and Arabs, and not between two states. By this emotions of hostility towards the Persians could be aroused among both Sunni and Shi'i Arabs in Iraq. The Iranian enemy was further referred to as 'the Yellow Storm' or 'the Yellow Wind' and was thereby equalised to the Mongolian invasion of Baghdad that destroyed the Abbasid caliphate 1258. Like the Mongolians the Iranians were bloodthirsty, aggressive and prone to war. Expressions like 'the strategic hatred' and 'the black hatred' were also applied to describe the Iranian character. The fearful image was completed by a demonisation of Khomeini's persona and especially of his Islamic mission. His revolution was not Islamic according to the Ba'th regime, because it was built on hostility towards Arabs, and an enemy of Arabs can not be a genuine Moslem. It was constantly repeated that Allah had actually chosen no others than the Arabs to spread the messages of faith, and that Arabic was the language of the Quran. Khomeini had simply not enough knowledge of the language to understand it properly, and he, as well as the Iranians in general, were in fact infidels. In other words the Iranians adhered to a new religion that had nothing to do with Islam besides some common outward features of the true faith. Simultaneously the regime emphasised the value of *true* Islam such as practised in Iraq.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Bengio, 1998, pp 139-45, 181.

3. Analysis

The analysis is divided into three sections, each accounting for two of the in whole six patterns of thought distinguished in the blog-sources. The patterns have been labelled: 1) Anti-Sectarianism, 2) Tolerance as a Group Norm, 3) the Iraqi Victimation, 4) the Rulers-Ruled Cleavage, 5) Foreign Influences in Islam – the Enemy Within, and 6) the Failure of Arabism.

References in the discussion to *the bloggers* without any further specification ought to be understood as a term of generalisation.

In the analysis both single and double quotation marks ('xxx' and "xxx") are used. The first form is employed to signal that a statement of a blog-writer is mediated with the blogger's choice of words, although not exactly reproduced. The latter form is for genuine quotations.

3. 1 Anti-Sectarianism and Tolerance as a Group Norm

The situation developed in Iraq since April 2003 seems to indicate that the Ba'th regime was rather successful in its efforts to atomise the society and foster distrust between different ethnic and religious communities. What is often described as 'sectarian violence' has almost become a daily phenomenon⁸⁵ and the society has very much reorganised itself in accordance with ethno-religious lines. This is especially noticeable in the political sphere where most of the political parties can be identified as ethno-religious factions.⁸⁶ The political structure is in turn reflected on the domestic media market since the major parties also are major media owners and financiers.⁸⁷ Migration movements within Baghdad have made the city highly segregated and divided into sectarian neighbourhoods.⁸⁸ Some of the bloggers witness a situation in the streets where names like 'Ali (typical Shi'i name) and 'Umar (typical Sunni name) might decide one's 'destiny' depending on where one happens to be.⁸⁹

Even so, if one expects to find deeply rooted sectarian schisms in the Iraqi blogosphere, one will soon be disappointed as the general trend points to the opposite.⁹⁰ The following words written by the blogger Riverbend (*Baghdad Burning*) in August 2003 sum up this quite well.

We get along with each other - Sunnis and Shi'a, Muslims and Christians and Jews and Sabi'a. We intermarry, we mix and mingle, we live. We build our churches and mosques in the same areas, our children go to the same schools... it was never an issue.⁹¹

⁸⁵ See for instance 'Iraq Violence', BBC, November 29, 2006.

⁸⁶ Examples of Shi'a-labelled parties are Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), al-Da'wa Party, and the Sadr Trend of Muqtada al-Sadr; of Sunni-labelled parties Iraqi Islamic Party, General Dialogue Conference, and the Unified National Movement; of Kurdish-labelled parties The Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK); of parties representing minorities Iraqi Turkmen Front and Assyrian Democratic Movement. Al-Marashi, 2007, Appendix pp 31-2.

⁸⁷ For further reading see al-Marashi, 2007. Or see Paul Cochrane, 'The "Lebanonization" of the Iraqi Media: An Overview of Iraq's Television Landscape', *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, no 16, 2006.

⁸⁸ See BBC's Baghdad map at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/in_depth/baghdad_navigator/.

⁸⁹ See The Woman, 'Killing the Sunnis!!', April 29, 2006; Meemo, 'Midnight Chitchat', July 20, 2006.

⁹⁰ The general absence of sectarian schisms has been observed by reviewers at *Iraq Blog Count* where two exceptions to this trend have been commented on. See *Iraq Blog Count*: Konfused Kid, 'Most Sectarian Blog Ever', May 4, 2007, and Salam Adil, 'Most Sectarian Blog Ever – Revisited', June 16, 2007.

⁹¹ Riverbend, 'We've Only Just Begun', August 23, 2003.

These words express an attitude of tolerance towards different communities and a perception that tolerance is the natural state which has now become disturbed. Doubtless, this trend is partly a reflection of a desperate desire for unity and reconciliation in a time of conflict and threats of separation. Nevertheless, looking closer into the blog-sources it becomes evident that there is clearly more behind it.

The first pattern of thought is perplexity and distress about the increasing sectarianism in Iraq. It indicates that peaceful coexistence is genuinely considered as being the natural order of the society. It should be observed that none of the selected bloggers presents herself/himself as Sunni or Shi'a as a part of the self-identity. Few of them actually openly mention which branch of Islam they belong to.⁹² It simply appears that the labels Sunni and Shi'a are regarded as rather insignificant. For instance, the blogger Faiza (*A Family in Baghdad*) writes:

Iraq has become divided into Shi'a and Sunni, Arab, Turkuman and Kurdish. This was not the case in the past. This is not the way to unite a nation. This is a way to divide people. I get emails from all over the world asking me if I am Sunni or Shi'a. You can hear people saying Sunni, Shi'a, Sunni, Shi'a, what a disaster. What is the difference between Sunni and Shi'a? They are all Muslims.⁹³

This tells against the presumption that sectarian belonging is a major variable of the propaganda effectiveness. On the contrary, this warns against attaching a too great importance to this factor. Among the bloggers the all-Iraqi community has without question the highest priority and they show a great pride in being Iraqis.⁹⁴ That some of their fellow countrymen have begun prioritising ethnic and sectarian affinities at the expense of the Iraqi one is regarded as upsetting and confusing. It is a new situation which is not understood. In fact, the bloggers think it is stupid. In one of his posts Meemo (*Iraqi Rocker*) writes about a headless body recently found near his home. He says that incidents like this now happen every day in Baghdad, informing his readers that in the last three days about 225 Iraqis got killed. Meemo asks why, for what reason have they been killed? He answers the question himself: it is because of 'wrong' beliefs or even 'wrong' names in the 'wrong' places. Further he says:

...the thing that I cant really understand is before the invasion we were the same, you know me and my neighbors all the neighborhood, we didn't change, we are the same people, but some of them they start to look at me in different way, from the belief side, they don't see people now just people, they see them like this guy is sunni or shi'i. when you talk with anyone now, the first thing he wanna know about you is what is your belief, even before your name, ...⁹⁵

Under the title 'Let's play musical chairs...' Riverbend wonders over the rotating presidency system, which was employed after the invasion before elections could be held, and which, in itself, was rather confusing. The system was engaged by Iraq's Interim Governing Council (IGC) as its members could not come to an agreement of one single person for president. Instead this post was to be held one month at a time by nine representatives of different ethnical and religious groups. The nine chosen

⁹² If one is to only take the analysed blog-materials in consideration it is actually only Faiza who openly tells her sectarian belonging. See Faiza, March 13, 2004.

⁹³ Faiza, March 13, 2004.

⁹⁴ See for instance Faiza, January 4, 2004; Ibn al-Rafidain, 'Why Ibn al-Rafidain?', June 17, 2004; Meemo, 'You Know You're Iraqi When:', March 6, 2006.

⁹⁵ Meemo, 'Midnight Chitchat', July 20, 2006.

consisted of 5 Shi‘is, 2 Sunnis, and 2 Kurds.⁹⁶ Riverbend, who thinks the whole idea of a selection based on such grounds is repulsive, wonders:

Are people supposed to take sides according to their ethnicity or religion? // Does every faction of the Iraqi population need a separate representative? If they do, then why weren’t the Christians represented? Why weren’t the Turkomen represented?⁹⁷

Initially claims for federalism in the post-Ba‘thi Iraq make Faiza surprised and puzzled. On a business trip to Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq in December 2003 she meets a local leader of a Kurdish party. She describes this meeting:

He was nice and friendly, then during my conversation, I mentioned the term “Northern Region”, so he interjected and said “Don’t use that term please”. So I smiled and remained silent, not understanding what had angered him! He continued saying “You are an Arab female from Baghdad and you are not aware that we (the Kurds) wish for our area to be called Kurdistan, we want a federal system and you guys in Baghdad won’t agree!”⁹⁸

Faiza discovers here that she has opened up a wound just by her choice of words, and she feels accused of being a racist. The incident annoys her and keeps her mind occupied trying to make sense of it. She is aware that the Kurds for a long time have suffered from repression carried out by the Arabs and that previous regimes have handled the Kurdish issue aggressively. Yet, she is not personally responsible for this and did not support these regimes’ treatment of the Kurds. That she is Arab does not automatically make her guilty.⁹⁹ Later on, she comes to the conclusion that it is not she but those supporting federalism who are racists, and claims for a federal solution make her really upset.¹⁰⁰

The increased sectarianism is not only generally viewed as a post-Ba‘thi phenomenon by the bloggers. They also often connect it to the Coalition’s policies rather than to the practices of the former regime.¹⁰¹ The Woman (*An Iraqi Tear*) mediating an interrogation of a friend of hers performed by an American soldier:

"Are you Shiite or Sunni?" they asked. "I am a Moslem", she answered. "You should answer Shiite or Sunni?", a Moslem, Amel insisted. "From where you are?" they asked. "I am from Misan, Emara", Amel said. "So you are a Shiite". "We are Moslems, my husband is from Mosul, and we live in Baghdad", Amel told them adding, "You are trying to separate Sunnis and Shites to destroy my country".¹⁰²

How is this confusion and distress to be understood on the basis of the Ba‘thi propaganda and the theoretical framework? In chapter 2 we have come to know that the regime used propaganda measures to nurse ethnical and religious cleavages, and that it is assumed that the Ba‘thists were quite successful in doing this. But the above points to the opposite. The bloggers do confirm that sectarianism has become a feature of the society. But this development has taken them by surprise, and they are inclined to identify it as a problem of the specific time, connecting it directly or indirectly to the

⁹⁶ See for instance ‘Iraq Chooses Rotating Presidents’, *BBC News*, July 29, 2003.

⁹⁷ Riverbend, ‘Let’s Play Musical Chairs...’, August 26, 2003.

⁹⁸ Faiza, January 6, 2004.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ See Faiza, March 13, 2004.

¹⁰¹ They, however, differ in opinion to what degree the Coalition is to be blamed. See for instance Riverbend, ‘Blog Fights...’, September 1, 2003; Meemo, ‘Step Up! Cause you’re the Next One in Line for the Kill. You Don’t Believe Me But I’m Betting that You Will’, May 22, 2006; The Woman, ‘The Mother’s Agony’, October 3, 2005; Faiza, January 14, 2004.

¹⁰² The Woman, ‘The Mother’s Agony’, October 3, 2005.

Coalition's invasion. Why have they not seen this coming? Is this a result of the Ba'th regime's news black-outs? This may be so, but does not explain why the bloggers have not adopted sectarianism while others apparently have. Have they not understood the hidden messages intended to atomise and foster xenophobia? Or have they just automatically rejected these without much thought? I think that the last question is the most appropriate one and that the answer is to be found in the bloggers' group situation. Returning to the initial statement of Riverbend we may observe the short sentence "We intermarry, we mix and mingle, we live."¹⁰³ What she refers to here is a form of cross religious and cultural integration occurring on a daily basis in schools and working places, and within families, neighbourhoods and circles of friends. People from different sub-communities are not isolated from each other. The frames of these communities become somewhat blurred. For instance, Meemo is from a Sunni-Shi'a mixed tribe, lives in a mixed neighbourhood,¹⁰⁴ and have mixed friends.¹⁰⁵ Riverbend's family and living situation is pretty much the same.¹⁰⁶ Faiza lives in a mixed marriage, and Mohammed (*Iraq the Model*) presents his friends as being from 'different segments'.¹⁰⁷ Ibn al-Rafidain (*Ibn al-Rafidain*) and The Woman do not refer to the subject, but in their blogs there are no signs indicating that their situations differ from the others'.

If we are talking about propaganda purposed to divide and alienate whole sub-communities, the group situation of the bloggers would most likely function as a barrier. On the other hand, it should be remembered that the open message the regime actually propagated for was unity. In this case the group situation would rather have functioned as a facilitator. The idea that different ethnical and religious affinities are accepted as long as the all-Iraqi affinity is given priority must have fitted very well.¹⁰⁸ Doubtless there is a consistency between this message and the pattern of thought. Despite this it is uncertain which role the propaganda has played. Did it cause the preference of the Iraqi identity or did it just strengthen an already existing attitude among the public? Both the theoretical and the contextual framework point to the latter. Messages following established opinions, norms, ideas etc are regarded to have the best, or perhaps even are the only ones to have, capability to be successful.¹⁰⁹ Likewise, the Ba'th regime's use of and investments in culture productions is considered to have met a growing interest in an Iraqi identity among the citizens, not to have created the interest.¹¹⁰

Whatever role the propaganda may have had, the message of unity has not been accepted without modification. What might have been the most important part – the one calling for loyalty to the Ba'thi state (and later to Saddam Husain himself) – has been rejected. Instead, the bloggers are urgent to make clear that they did not support the former leadership and explain that it in no way represented

¹⁰³ Riverbend, 'We've Only Just Begun', August 23, 2003.

¹⁰⁴ See Meemo, 'Midnight Chitchat', July 20, 2006.

¹⁰⁵ See Meemo, 'About Me!!', November 1, 2005.

¹⁰⁶ See Riverbend, 'Position Open', August 30, 2003; 'Christmas in Baghdad', December 26, 2003; 'Splitting Iraq...', January 8, 2004; 'Eid Mubarek...', November 25, 2003.

¹⁰⁷ Mohammed, 'One Square Kilometer', July 12, 2004.

¹⁰⁸ See Bengio, 1998, p 91.

¹⁰⁹ See Jowett & O'Donnell, 1986, pp 27-9.

¹¹⁰ See for instance Davis, 2005, pp 22-3.

the Iraqi population.¹¹¹ Almost like manifesting the distance they frequently stress that the Iraqis are a tolerant, friendly and peace-loving people. This stress represents the second pattern of thought having the title ‘Tolerance as a Group Norm’. The pattern alone does not prove it a norm, and below it is accounted for rather than investigated. But throughout the analysis we will find it reflected in other patterns of thought, and therefore it is here already presented as a group norm.

Also this pattern may easily be connected to the current situation but seems to be deeply rooted in a more long-time genuine tiredness of war, militarism and violent means to ‘settle’ differences. As for the Ba‘thists’ glorification of force and military power the bloggers’ experiences of armed conflicts, violence and threats of violence appear to have worked as a barrier to the propaganda. There are even signs of effects opposite to the intentions. Mohammed, who hid out from the military service under Ba‘th, finds it his duty to explain the disadvantage of armies, especially those in the Middle East which are often used against the domestic populations.¹¹² Ibn al-Rafidain writes that he does not understand how anyone ‘has the guts’ to harm anybody. Images of people who suffer stick to his mind, reminding him of ‘the brutality of man’.¹¹³ On another occasion he speaks warmly about a movie he recalls. The movie was about two soldiers from Germany and France respectively, who during a war between their countries by accident switch uniforms resulting in a number of comical incidents. The message of the movie, Ibn al-Rafidain says, is:

‘WAR IS NOTHING MORE THAN UNIFORMS AND GUNS and IF PEOPLE TAKE OFF UNIFORMS, DISMISS WEAPONS, then LOVE, UNDERSTANDING AND FRIENDSHIP WILL DOMINATE THE RELATIONS BETWEEN PEOPLES’,¹¹⁴

The second pattern of thought also includes an aspect which ought to be seen as a logic extension of the perception that tolerance and peaceful coexistence is the natural order of the Iraqi society. In the blog-sources ‘civilization’ is much of a catchword. ‘Being civilised’ is equalised with tolerance, to be able to live in peace and accept differences. Concluding a rather comical list of typical Iraqi features, Meemo writes:

Iraq is not just a place it is a state of mind. Being an Iraqi is an honor and a privilege; True Iraqis are True Teachers of Living, Loving, Learning and Leaving a Legacy. Iraqis have the habit of civilization.¹¹⁵

Faiza declares that civilisations both in ancient and modern times have always been built on love and peace, not on war, which only results in death and destruction.¹¹⁶ Riverbend ends her discussion regarding an incident in which a soldier from the Coalition forces handles a Quran in a disgraceful way with the following statement defining ‘civilisation’:

But that’s where the difference is: the majority of Iraqis have a deep respect for other cultures and religions... and that’s what civilization is. It’s not mobile phones, computers, skyscrapers and McDonalds; It’s having enough security in your own faith and culture to allow people the sanctity of theirs...¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ See for instance Meemo, ‘Short Post from Syria’, December 28, 2006; Meemo (untitled), December 13, 2006; Faiza, December 24, 2003; Mohammed, ‘You Owe Us an Apology’, November 17, 2003; Ibn al-Rafidain, ‘Waiting for Godot’, June 17, 2004.

¹¹² Mohammed, ‘Do We Really Need These Armies?’, November 24, 2003; ‘The First Candle’, April 9, 2004.

¹¹³ See Ibn al-Rafidain, ‘Feelings are Universal (1)’, November 9, 2004.

¹¹⁴ Ibn al-Rafidain, ‘Uniforms & Weapons’, December 1, 2004.

¹¹⁵ Meemo, ‘You know you’re Iraqi when:’, March 6, 2006.

¹¹⁶ Faiza, April 16, 2004. Also Faiza, May 3, 2004.

¹¹⁷ Riverbend, ‘Civilization...’, October 21, 2003.

Still, not everyone thinks the Iraqis are especially civilised, at least not politically. According to Ibn al-Rafidain the Iraqis are in need of an ‘educational rehabilitation’, to learn to be more civilised since the society is still formed by the tribal culture. He explains in a series of posts, giving his readers a historical background of Iraq, that there were some efforts during the Monarchy period to civilise the country. But this progress declined after the revolution 1958 and was totally lost during the rule of Saddam Husain. However, Ibn al-Rafidain also clearly identifies the most important attributes of ‘civilisation’ as being peaceful manners and tolerance. Indeed, he seems to be quite shocked by the brutal conduct of the Coalition’s forces since they come from countries he considers civilised.¹¹⁸

3. 2 The Iraqi Victimisation and the Rulers-Ruled Cleavage

The third pattern of thought emphasises the victimisation of the Iraqi people. It might at first be tempting to draw a parallel to the Ba‘thists’ picturing of Iraq as victimised, but the pattern has probably little to do with this propaganda theme. Considering the decades of wars, international sanctions, dictatorship, and constant violations of the Human Rights it is most likely first and foremost founded on experiences than anything else. Moreover, even though the bloggers also blame outside actors,¹¹⁹ they especially point out the Ba‘thi rule as the main cause for the sufferings. According to Faiza Saddam Husain plundered the state’s oil wealth in order to ‘wage silly wars which gave the Iraqis nothing but ruin and destruction’. About the isolation following the sanctions she declares that “We became like Josef sitting in the darkness of the bottom of the well”,¹²⁰ and continues:

After the wars and the beginning of the sanctions, the man [Saddam Husain] started to put his frustrations into wasting money on lavish palaces that he didn’t live in and in some case not even visited. I used to see trucks in the evening full of young men wearing wretched clothing. These young men would sit there in the trucks sticking one to the other. I would ask, who are these young men? The answer was, construction workers, working on construction for the palace of the president. I would remember his famous expression “O great nation of Iraq”. I would say, so these are the sons of the great nation of Iraq, building a palace for the great president. I wanted to cry from the my sadness on our state and our misery.¹²¹

Mohammed sums up the Ba‘thists’ view on the population as ‘a citizen equalises a suspect’,¹²² and defines Saddam Husain as ‘the tyrant’ and ‘our jailer’.¹²³ He looks back on the Ba‘thi period and the wars the regime dragged the Iraqis into:

We didn’t know what peace and order look like for a long time. It seems that it’s our destiny that the whole world use our small country as a battlefield for long successive wars in which no one cared to ask about our opinion.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ See the following posts by Ibn al-Rafidain: ‘Human Rights’, December 10, 2004; ‘Rambling Post (1)’, January 7, 2005; ‘Rambling Post (2)’, January 13, 2005; ‘Rambling Post (3)’, January 28, 2005; ‘Rambling Post (4)’, February 5, 2005; ‘Rambling Post (5)’, February 16, 2005; ‘Behaviour Makes Difference’, May 4, 2005; ‘Cultural Contrast (1)’, May 19, 2005; ‘Cultural Contrast (2)’, May 31, 2005.

¹¹⁹ The US is in particular pointed out. See Faiza, February 23, 2004; The Woman, ‘Enjoy the Winter!’, October 11, 2005. Also see Ibn al-Rafidain on Iraqis’ distrust of the US: Ibn al-Rafidain ‘Mistrust’, November 19 2004. A main exception is Mohammed who at first hand blames the UN, and among the countries especially France, Germany, Russia and the Arab states. See Mohammed, ‘You owe us an Apology’, November 17, 2003.

¹²⁰ Faiza, January 9, 2004.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Mohammed, ‘You Owe Us an Apology’, November 17, 2003.

¹²³ See for instance Mohammed, ‘Bon Voyage..!’, December 12, 2003; ‘A Step on the Road’, January 16, 2004.

¹²⁴ Mohammed, ‘Bon Voyage..!’, December 12, 2003.

Not surprisingly, the feeling of being victimised is transmitted to perceptions of the present. Like Ibn al-Rafidain puts it:

Iraqis are killed, nowadays, in a non-organized way. Till the 9th April 2003, Saddam organized the massacre under his control and the Iraqis were killed through rhythmical events. Americans, suicidal bombers, saddamists, baathists, Arabs, ordinary criminals...etc kill Iraqis chaotically. Iraqis are used as a cushion by several sides against each other. I can assure you that the Iraqis made the greatest number of final sacrifice in this region during the last fifty years. Still, they gained nothing.¹²⁵

An important feature of the pattern that should be noticed is that it stresses the victimisation of the *whole* Iraqi community of ordinary citizens. It is not denied that some may have suffered more than others, but the sufferings are still considered as a shared collective experience. Preferences to ethnical or religious affinities are thereby often viewed as attempts to monopolise the victimisation. Here the tone sometimes becomes quite harsh in the blogs. For instance, Faiza and a Kurdish co-worker in the store she and her husband runs have one day an intense argument relating to this. She begins to narrate the incident by ensuring the readers that this employee has always been treated well by her and her husband. In fact they have been extra friendly towards him and he has been a guest in their house many times. The quarrel starts in a conversation about the situation after the invasion. Faiza and her husband criticise certain behaviour of some political factions, among them a Kurdish party. The co-worker gets infuriated reminding them of the former regime's oppression of the Kurds which he thinks the Arabs did nothing about. He argues that the time has finally come for the Kurdish people to be free. His behaviour surprises Faiza who feels sorry for what has happened to him. But she also gets angry sensing 'the smell of hateful racism coming from him'. She continues:

I raised my voice in an angry way to tell him. Fine! you have worked with us for many years. Did we once mistreat you? Did we once not pay you on time because you are Kurdish? Have we ever disrespected you because you are Kurdish? Haven't you discovered that Saddam, oppressed us all, he didn't spare anybody. I am Shi'a, but do I hate Sunnis because they were close to Saddam? That would be stupid. Saddam was close to Shi'a, Sunni and Kurdish and anybody who was willing to act like a hypocrite. He didn't answer my questions. He left the store,...¹²⁶

Having recently heard that not only the Kurds but now also the southern Shi'is are calling for autonomy using the previous oppressions and mistreatments as a reason, The Woman writes infuriated:

They are insisting to divide Iraq taking Saddam a pretext... They refuse to believe that Saddam harmed the whole Iraq without differentiating among the Iraqis and the cities...¹²⁷

The pattern clearly gives a picture of a polarisation between the regime and the people. This supports Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett's thesis that it is more meaningful to discuss Ba'thi Iraq as divided between a minority of power holding Takritis and a majority of the population.¹²⁸ Indeed, one of the most striking overall impressions one gets from the blog-sources is that there has been a huge gap between the former leadership and the public. But the sources, especially the female blog-writers, further reveal that the perception of such a division is not exclusive neither for the Ba'thi era nor for Iraq. This structure which I here call 'the rulers-ruled cleavage' is the concern of the fourth pattern of thought.

¹²⁵ Ibn al-Rafidain, 'Kill, No One Punished', March 6, 2005.

¹²⁶ Faiza, March 13, 2004.

¹²⁷ The Woman, 'Happy New Year!!', December 27, 2005.

¹²⁸ Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 2001, pp 299-300.

Let us begin in the context of the Ba'th and examine what consequences the rulers-ruled cleavage might have had for the regime in its capacity of being the propaganda sender. In the theoretical framework it was declared that the sender-receiver relation is significant in influence processes. For instance, if the receiver can identify himself/herself with the sender, the sender's chance to be adhered to increases. If not, the chance decreases. Similar rules of thumb apply to factors like trust and interests.¹²⁹ On the basis of the polarisation shown in the victimisation pattern the circumstances speak against the regime in relation to these factors. It seems unlikely that a sender understood as harmful for the receivers will be identified with, or be trusted, especially when claiming to act in the interest of the receivers. But for how long has this polarisation existed? About this the blog-sources reveal little. Naturally, one can here follow scholars' assumption that the support and credibility the regime may have had began to decline in the mid 80s as a result of the prolonged war against Iran; continued to decline because of the invasion of Kuwait and the following Gulf war; and were totally lost during the sanction years. The narrowing of the power base to the family of Saddam Husain and the self-glorification of his leadership are also assumed to have alienated the regime from most segments of the Iraqi population.¹³⁰ Based on these arguments it is probably safe to say that the regime in the early 90s, if not before, enjoyed very limited capacity to affect the Iraqis' understandings of the reality in ways it desired. At that time it must have become very difficult for most Iraqis to identify themselves with the rule and to recognise the regime's interests as consistent with their own.

Despite this, occurrence of propaganda effects in line with the intentions can not be entirely ruled out. It is still possible that already existing opinions, norms and attitudes among the public have been strengthened by messages in consistency with these. Further, accepting the argumentation of the regime's loss of credibility and support in the beginning of the 90s one has also to accept the possibility of a different situation before this. The comprehensive development programs and the general improvement of daily life in Iraq during the 70s and early 80s may very well have given the regime the image to, at least to a certain extent, be acting for the public's good and therefore worth listening to. During the era of al-Bakr the rule was also presented as being the Ba'th Party's giving it some air of a more popular participation behind the political decisions than there actually was.¹³¹

Yet another aspect has to be taken into account. Returning to the bloggers' statements about the Iraqi victimisation it can be observed that Saddam Husain is directly pointed out as personally responsible for the sufferings. Most people would probably argue that he was, but the important thing here is that he is equalised with the former rule. This is a common line in the blog-sources. Other Ba'thi ministers or personalities are hardly even mentioned, and thereby more or less reduced to an anonymous 'gang of Saddam'.¹³² Surely, this is pretty much what Saddam Husain wanted to achieve by the development

¹²⁹ See McQuail, 1994, pp 339-42.

¹³⁰ See for instance Davis, 2005, pp 278-9.

¹³¹ See Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 2001, pp 135-6. Even if not being a factor of concern in this essay it should here be observed that these assumptions, although the grave generalisations, point at age as a plausible major variable for the propaganda effects.

¹³² Exceptions are: Ibn al-Rafidain, 'Justice', December 21, 2004 (refers to Saddam's son Qusay); The Woman, 'Halabja the Political Victory!', March 21, 2006 (mentions Tariq Aziz); Riverbend, 'The Red Cross and Terrorism', October 29, 2003 (mentions Tariq Aziz); Faiza, December 24, 2003 (mentions Saddam's son Uday).

of a cult and myth around himself and his leadership. Yet, if this equalisation is an effect of the propaganda it is hardly in his favour, as discontent with, and even hatred towards, the regime have become very much centred on him in person.¹³³ This raises the question if the distrust is also centred on him in the cases of the state institutions used as propaganda channels, such as the educational system and the cultural institutions. Even though Saddam Husain and his closest associates were most likely considered as lacking any credibility, there might have been others working within the rule, but not necessarily altogether directly identified as state representatives, who enjoyed some capacity to influence the public. At any rate one has to be open for the possibility that individual school teachers, officials, intellectuals etc may have been respected and regarded trustworthy.¹³⁴

On the other hand, as a phenomenon the rulers-ruled cleavage did not disappear with the toppling of Saddam Husain. Quite the same breach is to be found reflected in discussions on the post-Ba'thi political establishment. The female bloggers here have an interesting attitude coinciding with the propaganda. Observe that the Iraqi political elite of the interim governance¹³⁵ (which is the major subject in the discussions since most of the source material is written before the elections in 2005) included several prominent names from factions previously accused by the Ba'th of practising shu'ubism or 'being friends of imperialists'. The bloggers' attitude towards this elite bears close resemblance to these accusations, identifying them as marionettes of either the US or Iran, or both. As such they are naturally not viewed as representing the Iraqi people as claimed to do. In fact they are not regarded as 'real Iraqis' since many of them are returnees from long periods abroad, some for several decades.¹³⁶ Or as Riverbend puts it:

We need *real* Iraqis- and while many may argue that the Council members are actually real Iraqis, it is important to keep in mind that fine, old adage: not everyone born in a stable is a horse. We need people who aren't just tied to Iraq by some hazy, political ambition. We need people who have histories inside of the country that the population can relate to.¹³⁷

Faiza thinks that an 'Iraqi leadership out of the people would be loved, defended and guarded' by the people. She also points out that the future ought to be drawn by the Iraqis themselves, not by a "group of mysterious men approved by the USA".¹³⁸

This does not mean that exile Iraqis in general are not welcome back. However, expatriates are perceived to lack knowledge and understanding of the Iraqi society and the impacts of the wars and

¹³³ See for instance Mohammed, 'Happy Id for Everyone', November 27, 2003; Mohammed, 'Saddam is in the Cage', July 1, 2004; Faiza, January 16, 2004.

¹³⁴ An indicator pointing in this direction can be found in discussions of the de-ba'thification, which is generally viewed as a bad policy. The arguments against it are that it resulted in a mass unemployment among state officials, who many of them were only party members on paper, and that the state institutions were drained of competent people, including ba'thists. See for instance The Woman, 'My Day!!', November 10, 2005; Riverbend, 'Galub Memdeshen...', November 9, 2003; Ibn al-Rafidain, 'De-Baathification (I)', March 26, 2007; Ibn al-Rafidain, 'De-Baathification (II)', April 27, 2007.

¹³⁵ Including names like AhAMD Chalabi (Iraqi National Congress), Iyad Alawi (Iraqi National Accord), Massud Barzani (KDP), Jalal Talabani (PUK), Ibrahim al-Ja'aferi (Islamic Da'wa Party), Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim (SCIRI).

¹³⁶ Chalabi had lived outside Iraq since 1956, the larger part of his life been in the US and in the UK; Alawi had lived in the UK since 1971; al-Hakim had been in exile in Iran since 1980; al-Ja'aferi left Iraq for Iran in 1980 and from there moved to London in 1989.

¹³⁷ Riverbend, 'Iraqi Governing Council...', November 13, 2003.

¹³⁸ Faiza, May 6, 2004.

the sanctions which make them unqualified to run the country. By this the importance of the collective Iraqi victimisation is once again reflected. Already having indicated its significance in her statement above, Riverbend in another post further argues:

So what are the options? The options to people like that are Iraqis who were living with the people, inside of Iraq. Iraqis who were *not* affiliated with Saddam, but also not affiliated with the CIA. // They aren't being given a chance. Their voices aren't heard because they weren't in Washington or London or Teheran. There are intelligent, cultured people- professors, historians, linguists, lawyers, doctors, engineers in Iraq who can contribute to running the country. They understand the Iraqi mentality after over a decade of sanctions and three different wars- they know what the people want to hear and what needs to be done... they are competent. They aren't acceptable to the CPA because it can't be sure of their 'loyalty' to America..¹³⁹

The similarity with the concept of *shu'ubiyya* is clear. Nevertheless, it is far from sure that the bloggers' attitude really is a propaganda effect. The whole current situation is shaped up for this kind of attitude and there are many factors indicating that it could have appeared regardless of the propaganda. The notion of the politicians in question as being marionettes unsuitable to represent the Iraqis is commonly shared by Iraqi and non-Iraqi critics alike. However, there is one thing suggesting a heritage from the propaganda. Although some politicians are more or less unheard of, others are well-known since earlier, and they frighten the bloggers.¹⁴⁰ The Ba'thi media has doubtless at least partly contributed to this. It may therefore be argued that the regime's demonisation of the oppositional movements has been adopted. But it also ought to be remembered that these groupings' struggles against the regime often occurred in public places with violent methods causing casualties among civilians being in the wrong place at the wrong time.¹⁴¹ Further, these groupings have often fought each other resulting in a lot of bloodshed.¹⁴² Their very actions may have been quite enough to raise anger and fear.

That the male bloggers do not define the Iraqi members of the interim governance as marionettes or as not being 'real Iraqis' does not mean that they are comfortable with the new political elite. Quite the reverse, as they are inclined to have more trust in the leaders of the Coalition.¹⁴³ On this point, however, they strongly differ from the female writers who distrust these as well. The rest of the discussion in this section concerns therefore Faiza, Riverbend and The Woman alone.

Critics of the US-led Coalition's handling of the Iraqi question have sometimes described the situation as 'history repeating itself' pointing out that the Americans are making pretty much the same mistakes

¹³⁹ Riverbend, 'The Opposite Direction', August 28, 2003.

¹⁴⁰ See for instance Riverbend, 'Let's Play Musical Chairs', August 26, 2003; The Woman, 'Death Squads!', November 23, 2005.

¹⁴¹ Figures of casualties are difficult to find as it is in many cases not entirely clear what exactly has happened and who were responsible. See for instance Brinkley, 2004. Or Abedin, 2003.

¹⁴² The most common conflict brought up in the literature is the rivalry between the two major Kurdish parties, KDP and PUK. For further reading see for instance Ofra Bengio, 1999, 'Nation Building in Multiethnic Societies: The Case of Iraq', *Minorities and the State in the Arab World*, Ed. Ofra Bengio & Gabriel Ben-Dor, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London.

¹⁴³ See Mohammed, 'What Elections?', February 21, 2004; Ibn al-Rafidain, 'Security & Freedom', November 22, 2004. Meemo does not discuss politics much at all, and explains "...who cares about politics, not me for sure, 'cause politics in Iraq is a big lie, ...". Meemo, 'I am Alive', October 15, 2006.

as the Brits in the 20s.¹⁴⁴ It has even been argued that the situation has been dealt with so badly by the Bush Administration that its claims to bringing democracy to the country have damaged the very concept of democracy.¹⁴⁵ Also the bloggers picture the situation in a similar way, but they do not go that far back in history as the Mandate era. Instead they find plenty of examples in their own experience during the rule of Saddam Husain. They think that nothing has changed in the political sphere. The former leadership and the leading figures in current Iraq are just birds of the same feather. According to Faiza the Iraqis feel that their enemy comes from within – ranging from Saddam to the many actors of today who are “nothing more but neo-Saddams with different names and faces.”¹⁴⁶ Under the title ‘Saddam the “Value”!’, The Woman remarks:

On May 1st 2003; Bush announced that he liberated Iraq to save the Iraqis from the tyrant bringing to them the human rights according to the international laws, charters and accords The tyrant who spent 35 years killing and torturing the Iraqis. Yet the US military forces and their Iraqi collaborators forgot the Human Rights Charter in Iraq. //Whenever the Iraqis asked and still about their rights; the answer was and still, "could you dare to ask Saddam?" When the Abu Gharib scandal discovered...//...; the Americans and the new Iraq high ranking officials were trying to defend them selves saying, "but Saddam used to torture the detainees"!! When the International Transparency announced Iraq as the most corrupted country in the world; the new Iraq ministers say, "but Saddam was corrupted"!!¹⁴⁷

Riverbend on the new freedom of the press which turned out in a way familiar in Iraq:

This media free-for-all lasted for about two months. Then, some newspapers were ‘warned’ that some of their political content was unacceptable- especially when discussing occupation forces. One or two papers were actually shut down, while others were made to retract some of what they had written. The news channels followed suit. The CPA came out with a list of things that weren’t to be discussed- including the number of casualties, the number of attacks on the Coalition and other specifics. And we all began giving each other knowing looks- it’s only ‘freedom of the press’ when you have good things to say... Iraqis know all about *that*. Then the Governing Council came along and they weren’t at all comfortable with the media. They have their own channel where we hear long-winded descriptions of the wonderful things they are doing for us and how appropriately grateful we should be, but that apparently isn’t enough. So now, Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya are suspended for two weeks from covering the official press conferences held by the CPA and the Puppet Council... which is really no loss- they are becoming predictable.¹⁴⁸

As for democracy it is rather the term and not the concept that has lost its value. The bloggers, the males and the females alike, clearly show that they wish for a democratic Iraq (although not necessarily an American defined democracy).¹⁴⁹ However, regarding those in power positions as not being that much different from those of the old regime there is a disbelief in democratic intentions of the political elite and the Coalition. This distrust is further fed by the lack of progress in the democratisation and the violations to it.¹⁵⁰ The term and vocabulary of democracy used in political

¹⁴⁴ The Iraqi state emerged after the WWI under British mandate. Iraq became independent in 1932, although, real independence is sometimes considered achieved first in 1958 when the British installed Hashimite Monarchy was overthrown in the 14 July Revolution.

¹⁴⁵ See Polk, 2005, pp 190-200. Also see Haifa Zangana, December 22, 2004, ‘Quiet, or I’ll Call Democracy’, *The Guardian*.

¹⁴⁶ Faiza, May 6, 2004.

¹⁴⁷ The Woman, ‘Saddam the “Value”!’, November 22, 2005.

¹⁴⁸ Riverbend, ‘Freedom of the Press’, September 27, 2003.

¹⁴⁹ See for instance Faiza, February 17, 2004; Meemo, (Untitled), December 13, 2006; Mohammed (& Ali), ‘Iraqi National Assembly’, August 18, 2004; Ibn al-Rafidain, ‘Iraqis Adore Freedom’, February 1, 2005; Riverbend, ‘Iraqi Governing Counsel...’, November 13, 2003; The Woman, ‘Do Not Kill Our Children’, October 18, 2005.

¹⁵⁰ See for instance Faiza, January 14, 2004; The Woman, “779” the PKK List Participating in the Iraqi Elections!, December 16, 2005; The Woman, ‘The Democracy beheads the Students!’, December 27, 2005.

rhetoric have surely undergone a major inflation since 2003, but were probably already at the time of the invasion met with great scepticism. Remember that the Ba'th regime pictured itself as the truest democratic government ever, simultaneously as it denied the citizens all those elements usually agreed on as attributing democracy.¹⁵¹ But the Western World in general, and the US in particular, are in this case likely contributors to the Iraqis' experiences of gaps between words and deeds. The blog-writers think that democracy means little to the Americans outside the US.¹⁵² An interesting thing is that throughout the bloggings they become more and more certain that it might not mean much inside the US either. The major line of their reasoning is that the Bush Administration has lured the American citizens to go to, and pay for, a war against Iraq on false grounds using propaganda slogans about democracy and freedom.¹⁵³ Although sometimes departing from it, the perception here is that the American public, as being misled to serve the interests of a handful of powerful men, as well is a victim of the war and the occupation of Iraq. It is thereby further pointed out that there is not that much difference between the leadership in Washington and Saddam Husain. The rulers-ruled cleavage is thus applied in an American context. Sometimes this understanding appears to be an aha-experience and sometimes a suspicion being confirmed. It is therefore difficult to say if it already existed during the Ba'th or not. Nevertheless, it is clear that the perception of society as structured in this form of division is an important aspect that should be taken into account also in the future.

3. 3 Foreign Influences in Islam – the Enemy Within and the Failure of Arabism

The fifth pattern of thought is notions of foreign influences in Islam, meaning not belonging to the true faith, and, from the bloggers' view, also literally coming from abroad, notably Iran and Saudi Arabia. Adherents to such influences are often described in ways very similar to the *shu'ubi* definition. Once again it should be remembered that the situation in today's Iraq makes it difficult to study this specific propaganda theme. We are here dealing with a source-material about groupings including elements which would without doubt be considered dangerous in any case, such as religious-political militias, terrorists and criminals. Nevertheless, the pattern also reveals circumstances clearly pointing to a group situation very favourable for an adoption of the *shu'ubiyya* concept.

The foreign influences in Islam are sometimes discussed without any differentiation between the Sunni and Shi'a branches, and sometimes with a particular focus on Shi'ism. There are some differences between the two approaches which makes it appropriate to investigate them one at a time. However, aspects of group situation discussed in connection to each of them apply to both. As the propaganda to a great deal concerned the *shu'ubi* threat from the Islamic revolutionary regime in Teheran and its alliance with Shi'i factions in Iraq¹⁵⁴ it is suitable to begin with the focus on Shi'ism.

In section 3.1 it was concluded that the bloggers' group situation with its lack of distinctive sectarian divisions would most likely function as a barrier for attempts to alienate whole sub-communities. Therefore it is unlikely that the *shu'ubiyya* label has been understood or accepted as referring (as

¹⁵¹ See Bengio, 1998, p 61.

¹⁵² See for instance Faiza, February 23, 2004; Riverbend, 'Just Go...', May 7, 2004.

¹⁵³ See for instance Faiza, January 20, 2004; The Woman, 'The Bells Ring in US; the Hearts Hear in Iraq', October 26, 2005; Riverbend, 'Setting the Record Straight', August 22, 2003.

¹⁵⁴ See Bengio, 1998, pp 104-6.

scholars argue that it was purposed to do) to the entire domestic Shi'a population.¹⁵⁵ Supporting this assumption is a perception of different Shi'isms practised in Iraq. Roughly it is described to exist two Shi'a versions, a genuine Iraqi and sound interpretation of the faith, and an Iranian influenced, corrupt understanding of it. This reminds very much of Saddam Husain's picture of the Iranians as adhering to a new religion and the Iraqis as practising true Islam.¹⁵⁶

Faiza, who is a devoted Shi'a Moslem, does not recognise the flagellation ceremonies during 'Ashura. She means that these are "violent and hurtful acts that bare no relation to the story of Hussein."¹⁵⁷ Riverbend comments on the same issue when accounting for the background and the traditions of 'Ashura, pointing out that the self-beating ritual is far from accepted by all Shi'is. Having newly witnessed a smaller group of men performing the ritual in Baghdad, she informs her readers that it is more common in southern Iraq, especially in Karbala:

I don't like the ritual. It doesn't feel sacred or religious and many Muslims consider it a wrong, since it is considered 'haram', or a sin, to disfigure the body. This year, Karbala is going to be especially crowded because, in addition to Iraqis, there are going to be thousands and thousands of Iranians who have somehow gotten into Iraq.¹⁵⁸

Like the purpose of the *shu'ubiyya* concept,¹⁵⁹ the Iranian influenced Shi'ism functions much as an antithesis to the form of Shi'a Islam viewed as correct. Below a hint about the difference between the two versions is given by The Woman:

Fearing the "men in black" I asked a Shiite taxi driver whom I know to drive me whenever I need going some where. // Around the steering wheel; my driver puts a piece of green cloth that he brought from Imam Ali Shrine to bless his car; this green is a singe that the owner of the car is Shiite; a singe that satisfies me..

Yesterday a while before the mid night I woke up when the mosque opposite to my house suddenly began calling "Allah Akber"!. It was not the time of prayer!! From the window I saw more than 20 wearing black were trying to attack the mosque; with the second call; heavy fires were exchanged between the near check point of the National Guard and the black wearers who at last withdrew..¹⁶⁰

The nickname 'Men in Black', (also 'Men in Black Turbans')¹⁶¹, is applied to adherents of the Iranian Shi'ism. Such black-wearing men are violent and frightening. Attacking Shi'i clergymen not approving the Iranian influences, and harassing citizens not following certain dress-codes and rules, they stand for intolerance, backwardness, and particularism. Riverbend introduces her readers on the subject:

Men in black turbans (M.I.B.T.s as opposed to M.I.B.s) and dubious, shady figures dressed in black, head to foot, stand around the gates of the bureau in clusters, scanning the girls and teachers entering the secondary school. The dark, frowning figures stand ogling, leering and sometimes jeering at the ones not wearing a hijab or whose skirts aren't long enough. In some areas, girls risk being attacked with acid if their clothes aren't 'proper'.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁵ See Bengio, 1998, pp 105-6. Or see Davis, 2005, p 188.

¹⁵⁶ See Bengio, 1998, p 181.

¹⁵⁷ Faiza, March 3, 2004. Observe that this is the only time Faiza points out 'foreign' elements in the context of Shi'ism. However, similar statements are found in the broader context of Islam.

¹⁵⁸ Riverbend, 'Ashoura...', February 29, 2004.

¹⁵⁹ See al-Khalil, 1990, p 219.

¹⁶⁰ The Woman, 'Killing the Sunnis!!', April 29, 2006.

¹⁶¹ The nickname may at a first glance make one think of Ba'thi definitions of Iran such as 'The Black Hatred', but seems actually to have emerged inspired by the American film title M.I.B. (Men in Black), which is indicated in Riverbend's statement below in the analysis.

¹⁶² Riverbend, 'We've Only Just Begun...', August 23, 2003.

Following the view that the sectarian labels are rather insignificant, the picture of Shi'a Islam, presented as it ought to be understood correctly, reminds of the idea of Shi'a as being only a *madhhab* alongside the four Sunni schools. Perhaps this is an effect of the Ba'th regime's preference to refer to the Iraqi Shi'is as *al-madhhab al-Jafariyya*. Yet, it must be remembered that the idea dates several hundred years back.¹⁶³ It may have been an established norm in the society long before the Ba'thi era. Moreover, it is a perfectly suitable attitude to adopt on the background of the bloggers' group situation with its blurred religious and cultural frames. On the other hand, if one is to consider this as reflecting a group norm rather than a propaganda heritage, one should take into consideration the possibility that the regime found this norm convenient to exploit. If so, it is reasonable to argue that the propaganda may very well have strengthened it. Of course, the same must be applied in the context of the perceptions concerning those regarded as not acting in consistency with the norm.

Another factor of the group situation in harmony with the propaganda is the impacts of the modernisation process in Iraq. The bloggers often stress that the Iraqis are a modern Moslem people, highly educated and skilled.¹⁶⁴ They also show that they are well-orientated in Iraqi, Arab as well as Western culture and have an attitude that each has something to offer.¹⁶⁵ As will be discussed later, an open mind for good influences, wherever they come from, is regarded as the key to progress. The opposite becomes thereby highly equalised with backwardness, a character identified as typical for the Iranian's interpretation of Islam. Hence religious influences from Iran are both unwanted and unsuitable for the Iraqi society. Even though one hardly can describe the Ba'th regime as being open minded, its warnings against the threatening theocratic regime in Iran might have fallen in fertile ground. It is even possible, as scholars sometimes argue, that the Iraqis considered the secular Ba'thi leadership as a better alternative in comparison with a religious one like that in Teheran. However, it is far from certain that rejection of one thing automatically implies support for another. For instance, Jowett & O'Donnell mention that the repeatedly blackening of the Solidarity movement in Poland by the official propaganda machine eventually made people think that "these Solidarity extremists really were bastards" but this affected in no way their hatred of the government.¹⁶⁶

The Iranian influences are considered to be especially inappropriate as they clash with the far accomplished emancipation of the women in Iraq, a feature of the society the bloggers are very pride of. Naturally, this clash is discussed as a much more complex problem than being a question of dress-codes for women, but women's clothing is very much a symbol for it. In one of her posts The Woman has published three photos, which reflect this. She tells that each of them picture Iraqi female students. The two first photos were shot in 1963 and 1964 respectively. The young women in the pictures have a typical look for the fashion at the time: big hair, short shirts or tight trousers. The third photo is shot in 2006. The female students in this picture are dressed in black from top to toe not even showing their faces. Below the photos, The Woman writes:

¹⁶³ See Bengio, 1998, p 99.

¹⁶⁴ See for instance Faiza, May 11, 2004; Riverbend, 'The Promise and the Threat', August 28, 2003.

¹⁶⁵ See for instance Mohammed 'We All Need to Dream', February 1, 2004; Faiza, February 23, 2004; Riverbend, 'About Riverbend', August 24, 2003; Meemo, 'About Me!!', November 1, 2005.

¹⁶⁶ Jowett & O'Donnell, 1986, p 166.

You can imagine the condition in Iraq through these photos. Iraq was the most developed and liberated country in the Middle East and among the Islam World although the Iraqis were devoted Moslems; yet they knew the real Islam not the Iranian imported Islam...¹⁶⁷

Islamic clothing in itself is not criticised or viewed as an attribute of backwardness, it is the compulsion to wear it which is attacked. Upset about an article on Iraq, in which an American anthropologist (Dr Stanley Kurtz) claims that “a key purpose of veiling is to prevent outsiders from competing with woman’s cousins for marriage,”¹⁶⁸ Riverbend gives a comprehensive lesson in the many fashions of Islamic dressing. Totally rejecting this veil-and-cousins-thesis, she comments:

I have a question: why is Dr. Kurtz using the word ‘veil’ in relation to Iraq? Very, very few females wore veils or burqas prior to the occupation. Note that I say ‘veil’ or ‘burqa’. If Dr. Kurtz meant the general ‘hijab’ or headscarf worn on the hair by millions of Muslim females instead of an actual ‘veil’ then he should have been more specific. While a ‘veil’ in Saudi Arabia or Afghanistan is quite common, in Iraq it speaks of extremism.¹⁶⁹

Also Meemo discusses the new dress-codes in Iraq, himself being a victim of harassment because of his looks. Goat beard, jeans and short pants (all attributes of Meemo) are by some viewed as ‘pagan’. But he refuses to change his style – why should he, when he has dressed like this more or less all his life. In turn the refusal means that his freedom of movement becomes rather restricted and he always has to be careful when outdoors. Meemo further informs his readers that in Baghdad one now finds signs directed to the women reminding them to cover their hair. In some areas females are not allowed to wear trousers and women should not drive cars. There are many different rules in different neighbourhoods and those who do not obey them are often punished in most brutal fashions. This is hardly a good way to make people more religious, Meemo thinks. On the contrary it pushes people away from it. He has chatted with an Iranian girl on the internet and has found out that this is exactly what has happened in Iran.¹⁷⁰

Let us not forget that the *shu‘ubi* label or the propagation about corrupt interpretations of Islam were in no way exclusively applied by the Ba‘th regime in the context of Shi‘ism and Iran. The broader Moslem approach reveals that Saudi Arabia, Syria and other Arab states are also seen as hostile to Iraq. In these discussions the influences corrupting the Islamic faith are notably identified as Afghani or Saudi. Such influences are viewed as much, if not more, threatening, foreign and backwards as the Iranian Shi‘ism.

While the discussions focusing on Shi‘ism deals with Iraqis, linked to and supported by the Iranians interested in exporting their Islamic Revolution, the all-Islamic ones concerns notably non-Iraqis being in the country fighting the Americans and their allies. Although some of the bloggers recognise an Iraqi resistance against the occupation, these foreign, mostly Arab, combatants are regarded simply as gangs of terrorists or/and criminals. Backed up by neighbouring regimes wishing to prevent a

¹⁶⁷ The Woman, ‘Iraq Before and After the “LIBERATION”!!’, May 2, 2006.

¹⁶⁸ Riverbend, ‘Cousins and Veils...’, October 1, 2003.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ See Meemo, ‘I’m Back:’ May 13, 2006; ‘Step up! Cause you’re Next on the Line for the Kill. You Don’t Believe Me but I’m Betting You Will:’, May 22, 2006.

democratic development in Iraq, these armed groupings are purposed to bring chaos into the Iraqi society.¹⁷¹ According to Meemo:

...they just want Iraq to burn cause they know if Iraq going to be a peaceful and democratic country they will just disappear, they are sending money for the terrorists and sending terrorists everyday they never want Iraq to get back on its feet, they are afraid of democratic Iraq as much as they were afraid of Saddam, so if they want to bring back peace to Iraq, they must destroy the source of all terror in the world which is Saudi Arabia, that's what I think.¹⁷²

Mohammed describes the Muhadjidin as foreign elements identifying them as terrorists first appearing in Afghanistan and now following the American troops wherever they are going.¹⁷³ In another post he states:

The attacks in the last few days illustrate the spots of the terrorists presence and activity whom foreigners represent a high percentage of their count because of the close proximity of Diyala governorate to Iran and the close proximity of Anbar and Mosul governorates to Syria, the two countries that have the greatest interest in the failure of the democratic process in Iraq.¹⁷⁴

Besides condemning terrorism and showing that also the Arab neighbours are perceived as hostile to Iraq, the blog-sources suggest that the mixed Islamic-military rhetoric of Saddam Husain had little in common with the nature of the middle-class' religiosity. The bloggers' view on Islam is highly consistent with the group norm stressing tolerance and peaceful coexistence suggesting that it is a part of this norm. Faith is regarded as something to turn to for comfort in times of distress, and as something encouraging kindness, charity and modesty.¹⁷⁵ They have a rather Abrahamic religious standpoint and reject the thesis of 'the clash of civilisations'.¹⁷⁶ This is a thesis belonging to extremists of all kinds.

As for Saddam Husain's 'defender-of-Islam-role' and his personal commitment to the faith, the bloggers appear to be little impressed.¹⁷⁷ Instead they point out that Islam has often been used as a pretext by people and sometimes in contexts having little to do with the religion. To put it differently, the image of Islam has been damaged by governments, factions and individuals who in reality only are interested in achieving their own agendas. Here the experience of Saddam's Islamic rhetoric may be a contributor, but he seems to be far from the only source for this understanding, nor the major one. For instance, Riverbend argues that an Islamic rule in theory does not imply a backlash for women's rights, rather the contrary, but thinks that

Islamic government doesn't work because the people running the show usually implement certain laws and rules that have nothing to do with Islam and more to do with certain chauvinistic ideas in the name of Islam- like in Iran and Saudi Arabia.¹⁷⁸

Faiza, depressed at the last decades' development in the Arab World:

¹⁷¹ See The Woman, 'Between the Zarqawi Hard Place and the American Rock!', November 22, 2005; Ibn al-Rafidain, 'Good News', November 27, 2004.

¹⁷² Meemo, (Untitled), December 13, 2006.

¹⁷³ Mohammed, 'As Long as It Takes', January 18, 2004.

¹⁷⁴ Mohammed, 'But they can't Kill Iraq', June 24, 2004.

¹⁷⁵ See for instance Faiza, February 23, 2004; Faiza, March 4, 2004; Ibn al-Rafidain, 'Happy New Year', February 10, 2005; Riverbend, 'We've Only Just Begun', August 23, 2003.

¹⁷⁶ See for instance Ibn al-Rafidain, 'Christmas', December 24, 2004; Faiza, February 13, 2004; Riverbend 'Clashes and Churches', August 7, 2004; The Woman, 'Allah or God!!', February 5, 2006.

¹⁷⁷ See for instance Faiza, January 18, 2004; Mohammed, 'Happy Id for Everyone', November 27, 2003.

¹⁷⁸ Riverbend, 'Girl Power and post-War Iraq', September 16, 2003.

We sunk in ignorance and backwardness. Even religion, we lost the beautiful side of it that emphasizes truth and courage towards change. We got the ugly face that pushes silence, obedience and oppression of women. A man marries four woman. The whole world got a stupid and ignorant image of us...¹⁷⁹

Mohammed about the wave of kidnappings and beheadings of abductees published on internet and broadcasted on TV channels around the world:

Who are these people? I see that they're the product of fanaticism that was fed and upgraded by dictatorships in the Muslim world; they are a mutant generation that came as a result of this unholy marriage between retarded religious institutions and brutal dictatorships. In the recent past people just like these were carrying swords at Saddam's days, cutting people's throats for the most trivial reasons. Cutting hands and decapitating is a character of dictatorships that use Islam as a cover to give them legitimacy and to justify their evil wills. It's a concept that these regimes still try to popularize and one just have to look at the Saudi government. Why do they still use the sword to cut hands and heads of convicted people? Doesn't this contribute in bringing such a mutant generation to existence?¹⁸⁰

The rather hostile tone towards other Arab states continues in the sixth (and last) pattern of thought which is named 'the Failure of Arabism'. The title embraces more than one connotation. Two major kinds of emotional responses to the propagation of Arabism are distinguished in the blog-sources: disappointment of Arab solidarity in reality and frustration over the devastating consequences Arab ideologies have had in the region. While the first indicates effects in line with the propaganda, the second points to opposite effects. Despite the differences they are here treated as a single pattern since they have some important features in common. Both have the perspective of the Arab World as divided in accordance with the rulers-ruled cleavage, and both picture Arab populations as victims of authoritarian rulers to which Arabism is a tool for power.

For Faiza and The Woman Arab solidarity in reality is an issue of great disappointment. As this emotion is based on the attitude that there ought to be such a solidarity, it can be said that they have accepted the very ideas of an Arab community and loyalty. The focus of their disappointment is Arab leaders' failure to follow up their rhetoric with actions, or perhaps more correctly, the leaders' acting in opposition to it. Faiza gives a good picture of how the dream of a prosperous, united Arab nation, which she learned to believe in and work for, was crushed many years ago. She remembers how dedicated everyone was to the Arab mission, particularly to the liberation of Palestine, when she was young.¹⁸¹

We all, young and old, would repeat the same slogan, with our blood and with our sole we will defend you O Palestine. Our composition essays at schools were always about Palestine. At the end of the essay we always wrote, we are returning to Palestine. We had such naive and distant dreams. We paid for it dearly later. Today I laugh in sadness at how ignorant we were. We dreamt of building free and independent homeland. And that we would get united into one single Arabic nation that is feared by all our enemies.¹⁸²

Palestine, Faiza explains, was used as a trump card by all Arab governments in order to win people's support. In practice the governments did not act in accordance with their preaching. Neither did many of the members in the political movements. This became a painful experience for Faiza when she and

¹⁷⁹ Faiza, February 23, 2004.

¹⁸⁰ Mohammed, 'Paul Johnson; You Are Much Closer to Allah than Those Who Kill Innocents in His Name', June 19, 2004.

¹⁸¹ Faiza, February 23, 2004.

¹⁸² Ibid.

her husband went to Lebanon as volunteers shortly after graduating from university and getting married in 1976. In Lebanon the young couple was to rebuild Palestinian refugee camps destroyed in the civil war going on at the time. Faiza had been convinced that the work was a noble thing to do, even worth dying for. But she discovered it was a mistake. There were a lot of 'selfishness and private interest at play', corruption and trivial conflicts in the organisations. After two years Faiza returned to Baghdad, but soon went to Amman. There she and her husband were met with suspicion by the Jordanian Intelligence and were put under restrictions. The reason was their activities in Lebanon.¹⁸³

I couldn't understand what our crime was. We went as volunteers to help desperate people in refugee camps. What got these people angry? What made us turn in accused? Why were we denied our rights? All arab radio stations were crying about Palestine so we went to help out, where is the mistake? This was the second shock in my life after Lebanon. I started to look at things with a different perspective. There is a big gap between media and the reality in the arab countries. Beautiful talk but ugly deeds. Lies without any limits, why do they lie? This question tormented me for long...¹⁸⁴

Since then, the disappointments have kept coming one after the other. There have been an endless circle of violence, destruction and chaos; Arabs have turned against Arabs, and Moslems against Moslems. On the 'Arab street' people became more and more frustrated, confused and depressed, Faiza says. Their dreams became crushed by their governments which continued to 'stall, lie and make bogus claims'. But she also blames the Americans who have participated either officially or behind the stage in many of the conflicts in the region. Especially the military and economical support to Israel is pointed out by Faiza, though she also mentions other American foreign policies, for instance the backing up of Saddam Husain in the Iraq-Iran war.¹⁸⁵

While Faiza appears to have lost all her expectations of Arab solidarity, The Woman still is in a state of anger at the indifference and selfishness within the Arab community. She had almost thought 'the Arabs would die when Baghdad was occupied', but they did not - they did not care.¹⁸⁶ In another post she writes:

So in that eight year bloody war [i.e. Iran-Iraq war] Syria gave every possible support to the Iranians. In 1991, Syria, again Hafiz Al-Asad allied with USA launching one of the dirtiest war of the history against Iraq.. Not only Syria, but Egypt and other Arab States; and the all with the Arab League supported the unfair sanctions imposed on Iraq that killed 750 000 Iraqi children under five.¹⁸⁷

She continues, explaining that her anger is directed to the Arab regimes, not to the ordinary Arab citizen:

... Iraq was always close to the Arabs; but Arabs, the regimes not the nations insisted to kill the Iraqis with the American Administrations... The Arab Nations that are always ruled by unjust rulers and they have nothing to do but obey, ...¹⁸⁸

For Mohammed and Ibn al-Rafidain Arabism is a major and most annoying obstacle for a progressive development in the region. Hence they represent the response identified as frustration. Here the failure is the unsuccessful attempts to impose even the most usual ideas related to pan-Arab

¹⁸³ Although, initially they were accused of being members of the Ba'th Party.

¹⁸⁴ Faiza, February 23, 2004.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ The Woman, 'My Day!!', November 10, 2005.

¹⁸⁷ The Woman, 'I am Confused', November 1, 2005.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

ideologies. Ibn al-Rafidain classifies Arab nationalism as raised from ‘tribal sectarianism’, a feature of Bedouin culture including strict adherence to the tribe, chieftaincy, revenge, succor, lineage boast etc.¹⁸⁹ It has caused Iraq and other Arab countries a lot of problems and uncivilized political behavior.¹⁹⁰

Mohammed who dreams of a ‘United States of the World’ also speaks in terms of a regional unification as a vision for the future. However, this unity is not a question of Arab ethnicity but an idea of a community of democratic nations in the Middle East. To achieve such a development the region must naturally become free from dictatorship and oppression but also of a common practice among the Arabs of refusal to adopt ‘foreign ideologies’. Mohammed finds this practice, not the Israeli occupation of Palestine or the American of Iraq, the main obstacle for prosperity. He further finds this practice ridiculous, especially since no alternative ideas are presented by the Arabs themselves. In the last decades the Arabs have not produced anything but ‘historical leaders’ (Mohammed’s quotation) who allowed ‘no methods of thinking other than theirs and no mature vision other than ones they saw’.¹⁹¹ In the end though, the main problem is the repressive regimes:

Certainly we do not lack thinkers, but sadly those found no suitable place, as if they expressed their minds they would be charged immediately as agents for the CIA or traitors who should be strictly monitored and may be imprisoned if not eliminated (which is the most usual fate).¹⁹²

Also Ibn al-Rafidain gets frustrated at what he sees as a blind refusal of ideas identified as coming from outside the Arab community, especially those which might in any way be connected with Israel or the US.

I keep on telling my relatives & friends ‘I’m afraid that one day we will reject honesty as an ethical value because the Israelis or the Jews say it is a good one’. Another example is people who doubt democracy and refuse it, because it comes from America.¹⁹³

Considering the Ba’thi anti-Zionist rhetoric and stress on imperialists’ interests in Arab oil resources there are actually surprisingly few references mirroring the propaganda in the blog-sources. Israel is occasionally criticised as an aggressive occupying state, but there is almost a total absence of discussions within the frames of a perceived conspiratorial Zionist entity.¹⁹⁴ As for the oil interest of the West, there are some indications that at least the Americans’ agenda is taken for granted and hardly worth mentioning.¹⁹⁵ However, topics relating to Israel and to oil interests are generally very little discussed in the blogs, making it difficult to draw any conclusions.

The female bloggers have a much more negative attitude than the male blog-writers to things which can be linked to the occupational powers, sometimes even inclined to the kind of rejection that Mohammed and Ibn al-Rafidain speak of above. Still, they are rather opposing to that ideas, concepts,

¹⁸⁹ Ibn al-Rafidain is here following the famous sociologist Dr Ali Wardi’s identification of the three major Bedouin Cultural Complexes, tribal sectarianism being one of them. See Ibn al-Rafidain, ‘Rambling Post (1)’, January 7, 2005.

¹⁹⁰ Ibn al-Rafidain, ‘Rambling Post (2)’, January 13, 2005.

¹⁹¹ Mohammed, ‘Our Dream...Their Nightmare’, March 1, 2004.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibn al-Rafidain, ‘Weekend’, February 27, 2005.

¹⁹⁴ References to Israel of various kinds can be found at the following posts: The Woman, ‘Happy New Year!!’, December 27, 2005; Faiza, April 15, 2004; Faiza, May 23, 2004; Meemo, ‘Talking About Nothing’, July 30, 2006; Ibn al-Rafidain, ‘Gratitude’, April 14, 2005.

¹⁹⁵ See Faiza, March 24, 2004; Riverbend, ‘For Sale: Iraq’, September 24, 2003.

and decisions are imposed on the Iraqi public from above, than rejecting influences coming from outside.¹⁹⁶ Actually there is a desire to learn more about other societies and the people living in them, and the Western World, the US in particular, is very much an object for their curiosity. Partly this is clearly a result of the current US presence in Iraq. But the wakened interest appears to have an earlier date and to be caused by a questioning of the Ba‘thi picture of ‘the Other’.¹⁹⁷ It is therefore appropriate to conclude the analysis by a final statement from Ibn al-Rafidain.

“I’ve been trying to be more acquainted with American people through the internet which I started using it since few months before the recent war of 2003. I was, and still, wondering why we deal with the Americans, or the western in general, as enemies. So I started to gain pen pals from all over the world using the internet. For my amazement, I discovered that these people, especially the Americans, are wonderful, helpful and friendly. One should distinguish between the foreign policy of the administration of a certain country and its people. Let’s look forward to a day in the near future. A day on which the Iraqi people receive guests from all over the glob saying (Ahlan Wa Sahlan) which means welcome. And till that day comes allow me to be your host in this humble blog saying to all visitors (Ahlan Wa Sahlan), your visits and comments please me.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ See for instance Riverbend, ‘Let’s Play Musical Chairs...’, August 26, 2003; The Woman, ‘Do Not Kill Our Children’, October 18, 2005.

¹⁹⁷ See Faiza, January 20, 2004; Faiza, February 13, 2004; Ibn al-Rafidain, ‘Uniforms & Weapons’, December 1, 2004. Also see Riverbend, ‘About Riverbend’, August 24, 2003.

¹⁹⁸ Ibn al-Rafidain, ‘Uniforms & Weapons’, December 1, 2004.

4. Conclusion

So what kind of propaganda heritage is it actually meaningful to talk about, and in what contexts? The first conclusion one can draw from the analysis is that it is clearly not an issue of either altogether rejections or acceptances. Neither is the heritage a number of various kinds of effects without any logical reasons behind their occurrence. Both the consistencies and the inconsistencies between the Ba'thi messages and the bloggers' perceptions and attitudes can be explained by studying the group situation and answering the question: Which factors of the group situation have been the most dominating facilitators/barriers to the propaganda messages?

In section 2.1, Political and Social Overview, some factors, having had large impacts on the Iraqi society, were brought forward as a contextual base for the bloggers' group situation (and for the propaganda messages), including among others the general political climate, the modernisation process, the wars and the international sanctions. In the analysis this base became more clearly defined in the six patterns of thought, and additional aspects were revealed. Clearest reflected are the experiences of politics guided by interests of a few, sparing no pains to reach their ends. The perception, in the analysis referred to as the *rulers-ruled cleavage*, is one of the most dominating in the whole blog-material. The notion of a structural division and an alienation between leadership and population is without question especially distinctive in the understandings of the society under the Ba'th. However, it is clearly not regarded as an exclusive Ba'thi phenomenon but as a feature typical for the whole Arab World. Some of the bloggers even apply the rulers-ruled cleavage in Western contexts. This strongly suggests that the notion is an important part of the frames of interpretations. It should be taken into account when dealing with influence processes during the Ba'thi era as well as in today's Iraq.

The consequences of the rulers-ruled cleavage on the influence process in a Ba'thi context can be summed up as pointing to a situation in which the receivers find it difficult to identify themselves and their interests with the sender. Hence it can be assumed that it seriously decreased the Ba'th regime's chances to achieve effects in line with its intentions and that it has functioned as a barrier for the propaganda in general. Still, there are two possible cases of exception: the vilification of other Arab regimes and of the domestic oppositional factions. The sixth pattern of thought – the Failure of Arabism – shows that the overall Arab political sphere is distrusted, and indicates that the knowledge of how politics work can be traced to the pan-Arab rhetoric commonly employed by the regimes in the region. Although the bloggers have different views on the Arab community, they agree on that its leaders lack credibility, caring little about the welfare of the ordinary citizens but claiming that they do. It is uncertain exactly how far back the discontent dates, but if these regimes were already disliked it would not have been hard for the Ba'th to further strengthen this attitude. The same applies to the Iraqi oppositional factions. Compared with the Ba'th regime's grave violations of the Human Rights, the deeds of these factions can easily be forgotten. Yet, they are a part of the experiences of the general political climate. Obviously the bloggers also find it pretty much as difficult to identify themselves and their interests with the oppositional parties, now being a part of the political establishment, as with the former leadership.

The rulers-ruled cleavage includes an understanding of propaganda as a means, employed by politicians and others striving for power, in order to hide actual agendas behind slogans and catchwords appealing to the public. This notion turns up at least on three occasions relating to different themes: pan-Arabism, religion, and democracy. Thereby it is not only an important factor of the group situation but also a significant part of the propaganda heritage. Observe though, that its source embraces more actors than the Ba'th regime alone. It is a heritage grounded on wider experiences of propaganda. Also notice that it is at first hand linked to political rhetoric. Thus it can only be concluded that scepticism among receivers at first hand concerns messages delivered directly or easily identified as linked to a source known to have ambitions, interests or purposes relating to power. In turn, propaganda effects in line with the Ba'th regime's intentions can therefore be assumed to be founded more on cultural productions, works of scholars and the like, and less on news media outlets, speeches and statements of the leadership etc.

In the initial section of the analysis (3.1) some interesting factors with capacity to have functioned both as facilitators and barriers, depending on the content of the messages, could be added to the group situation. The bloggers reveal that they live in a multi-cultural environment lacking clear divisions between members of different sub-communities. This explains the very poor result of the messages aiming at nursing cleavages and distrust between the domestic ethno-religious communities. It is simply not convenient either to adopt or approve of sectarianism in such a milieu. Instead it is a strong motive for an adoption of the idea of a prioritised all-Iraqi affinity gathering a rich field of various elements, and evidently the bloggers have done so. The attitude reflected in the first pattern of thought – Anti-Sectarianism – shows that this idea is indeed deeply integrated.

In the second pattern of thought –Tolerance as a Group Norm – tolerance was presented as a virtue and a quality that should guide behaviour on individual as well as international levels. In a culturally mixed society at least a certain degree of tolerance to differences is probably a necessity, if daily life is to go on smoothly in schools, places of work, neighbourhoods etc. A part of this norm can therefore be traced to the lack of clear sectarian divisions. But there is also a part mirroring the experiences of many decades of political violence, repression, wars and overall atmosphere of hostility. Thereby it can be assumed to be a norm that has grown stronger throughout the years and to be interactive and interwoven with the rulers-ruled cleavage. That it is a dominating factor becomes obvious in relation to attitudes towards people acting against it. For instance, in the fifth pattern of thought – Foreign Influences in Islam – one finds perceptions, especially on some Shi'i groupings, almost appearing as school book examples of effects of the *shu'ubiyya* concept.

Also in relation to the post-Ba'thi establishment, including many elements previously accused of shu'ubism and the like, the parallels to the propaganda are very noticeable. Although the extreme situation in today's Iraq makes it difficult to deal with this specific propaganda theme, it can not be ignored that there are many indications of an acceptance of the message. Assuming that there is a strong propaganda heritage in this case, it ought to be observed that the *shu'ubi* label has not been interpreted as referring to large communities, but to smaller groupings using force to achieve political ends of selfish nature. The lack of clear sectarian division and the norm of tolerance are here manifested in the bloggers' interpretation of the *shu'ubiyya* concept.

While there were wide gaps between the regime's actions and words, the modernisation process should be seen as an important exception. The fast pace of development doubtless facilitated the promotion of national cohesion and pride. Despite the serious decline during the last decades the picture of being a modern people is still very vivid (although the bloggers also point out urban-rural differences). With this picture follows an understanding of the society as threatened by elements of backwardness. This is especially clear in the discussions on foreign influences in Islam. The indications are strong that the modernisation in general, and the women's emancipation in particular, have supported messages discrediting for instance the Iranian and the Saudi Islamic regimes and interpretations of the faith.

As a factor of the group situation the impacts of the modernisation should also be taken into account in a more general context of the propaganda. Being members of a well-educated and, at least until the sanctions, prosperous urban middle class, the bloggers are very much 'products' of the 70s and the early 80s development projects. The Ba'thi educational system, which was purposed to be an important component of the propaganda machine, has ironically indirectly increased both interest in and opportunities to gain alternative and broader pictures of reality, as a result of achieved knowledge and skills in fields like technology, foreign languages and science. It does not necessarily imply a situation that has always worked against the Ba'thi messages or that other actors and sources have had greater capacity to influence. But it points to a widening of frames of interpretation and better insights into different views, making it more likely that images of reality defined in black-and-white terms become questioned by the receivers. This naturally without denying the very limited situation for information flows not under Ba'thi control.

Despite the comprehensiveness and domination of the Ba'thi propaganda machine the analysis has shown that effects of the regime's messages among the middle class Baghdis are first and foremost of a *strengthening* kind. There are several perceptions and attitudes firmly integrated in the understandings of reality being in line with the propaganda, but the very perceptions and attitudes can usually be traced back to the pre-Ba'thi society. The large investment in culture productions has surely strengthened feelings of an all-Iraqi community. However, the idea of such a community was already well established before 1968. The same can be said about aspects relating to Arab socialism and unity, including secularism, improvement of women's status, state responsibility for public welfare and services, anti-imperialism, liberation of Palestine, Arab solidarity etc (though, the results in some cases differ). Also effects mirroring matters being more particular for the Ba'thi period, like the Islamic revolution in Iran, the strained Iraqi-Syrian relation, and the oppositional groupings, are strengthening in their character. The propaganda alone has not formed the attitudes relating to these issues, but is rather one factor in a web of interacting circumstances, norms, incidences, notions, experiences etc. Of course, this is also true for effects not in line with the propaganda, such as in the case of the regime's glorification of force and militarism.

Effectiveness in distributing messages is not necessarily the same as effectiveness in achieving intended purposes. While the regime was successful in promoting the concept of an 'Iraqi tent' among the Baghdi middle class, it did not manage to impose the idea of the Ba'th/Saddam Husain as the head of this tent, or at least did not manage to maintain it. The propaganda surely increased the discontent towards oppositional groupings and foreign regimes, but the Ba'th appears not to have won

any significant support by this. Likewise it may have, at any rate among some, strengthened beliefs about Iraq and the Arab World as victimised by American and Israeli interests. Still, the main problem in Iraq, as well as in the region, is identified as being the authoritarian political systems of the domestic leaderships.

Appendix: Blog-writer presentations

The six blogs are presented below in alphabetical order. All information given is from respective blog and concerns the status at the time when the material used in the analysis was written. The contents of each presentation vary depending on how much, and about what, the individual writer reveals about herself/himself.

- Blog: *A Family in Baghdad* (December 22, 2003 – June 3, 2004)
Writer: Faiza

Starting in the end of 2003 *A Family in Baghdad* was initially a blog for the Jarrar/al-Arji family with contributions from the mother Faiza and her three sons. It soon became more or less a forum for Faiza alone (the sons have their own personal blogs). Faiza is in her (late) 40s, a civil engineer and a devoted Moslem. She and her husband have a company store dealing in technical equipments for water supply and purification. The family has in periods resided abroad in different Arab countries but has lived in Iraq during the last 10 years.

- Blog: *An Iraqi Tear* (October 3, 2005 – June 19, 2006)
Writer: The Woman

This blogger is a single mother living with her 22-year-old son. She tells that she lost her father (just 62 years old) because of the medicine shortage during the sanctions. Besides this she reveals little about herself.

- Blog: *Baghdad Burning* (August 17, 2003 – June 18, 2004)
Writer: Riverbend

Emerging in August 2003 *Baghdad Burning* was one of the first blogs from inside Iraq. Riverbend has become rather well-known, and her writings have been published in two books. She is in her middle 20s, living with her parents and her brother. As a child Riverbend lived abroad, where is not told. The family returned to Baghdad when she was a young teenager. Riverbend has a degree in computer science and worked previously in a company within this field. After the invasion 2003 she has been out of work as her employer could not guarantee her safety – a destiny Riverbend says she shares with many girls in today's Iraq.

- Blog: *Ibn al-Rafidain* (June 17, 2004 – May 4, 2005)
Writer: Ibn al-Rafidain

Like many other Iraqis Ibn al-Rafidain is a former member of the Ba'th Party without being a Ba'thist. There are some signs indicating that he works within the field of education, although this is uncertain as he never speaks directly about his occupation. He has nevertheless a writing style which is rather

analytical, and he often structures the blog posts in series of lessons about issues concerning Iraq's history and society.

- Blog: *Iraqi Rocker* (December 27, 2005 – March 5, 2006)
Writer: Meemo

As his choice of blog-name indicates Meemo is a big fan of rock music, especially Metal (hard rock). Being 18 years old in late 2005 when he started his blog, Meemo is the youngest of the six selected writers. Besides music his interests are internet, computer games and 'hanging out' with his friends. He also likes sports like skateboard and baseball but has not much time for such activities because of his high school studies. Meemo writes first and foremost about his everyday life in Baghdad mixed with entertaining lists and song lyrics he likes, and he often writes with a lot of humour.

- Blog: *Iraq the Model* (November 14, 2003 – August 29, 2004)
Writer: Mohammed

Iraq the Model is shared by the three writers Mohammed, Omar and Ali, who rather regard themselves as a united trio than three individual contributors. As they all are very productive the material for the analysis has been cut down to that of Mohammed. He is a doctor and has lived in Iraq all his life. Mohammed belongs to the small, although existing, group of Iraqis who view the US-led Coalition as liberators. For him the invasion was highly welcome and he feels that his life literally began in April 2003 when the American forces entered Baghdad. Mohammed strongly supports globalisation and he thinks that the concept of nationality is the main hindrance for such a development. He dreams of a 'United States of the World' and hopes for Iraq to be the first country to give up the narrow nation state character.

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